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Prologue

The slushy floor of early newleaf spread the floor. Waters glinted brightly as it mirrored the starlit sky. Snow fell crashing down into the cold icy water. The earth drowned in unending water supply. It was empty of all scents. Mice and voles were chased out of their homes because of the water that flooded tree trunks. Silence was frozen in the air. Stones were covered with shiny coats of ice from previous melted snow. The air was cold enough to kill. Snow made it hard to trudge through, but stale paw prints that lay resting in the snow proved it was possible.

There was a dark movement that came from past the stones. A black she-cat appeared from behind the boulders. She padded along the smooth rocks and shivered with dull eyes. Her paw raised from the ground as she sat. A small tongue shot out of her muzzle when she licked her paw for warmth. She shivered again. Her round pink underbelly showed she was close to kitting.

Her tail hung lowly behind her as she got up and pushed herself on. A raspy cough made a fog smoke out of her mouth. She gulped and tried running on. Her stomach hung low near the still water beneath her. Instead, she decided to trot. Pain struck her stomach and she fell on her front paws. "My kits!" The queen yowled out loud.

A white warrior jumped quickly out from behind the stones behind the she-cat. The Tom rushed over to her, his muzzle touched hers gently. "Keep going, Coalstorm," said the Tom encouragingly. His voice was calm and soft. The cold air lowered his voice even more with the calm wind that brushed away his words. "We're almost there." He gave her a light push to the queen, convincing her to move fast enough to get to the nursery in time for her kitting.

The queen stumbled forward and meowed in distress. Yowls of pain shot out from her. "Icepelt, I can't do this-" Coalstorm fell ahead. Her face plunged into the cold water.

Icepelt stayed at her side. He couldn't imagine the pain she was going through. His tail drooped and he scooped her up, helping her with his back. Water dripped in ice pellets off her pelt. "Yes, you can." convinced Icepelt. His warm fur calmed the queen of her

frozen misery.
Coalstorm gave a smile of appreciation and dragged herself on. The strong scent of CloudClan gave her another chill. She looked up through the gorse tunnel. Her pelt was covered with droplets of ice that clung to her fur.
Icepelt guided her through the path of iced-over brambles. The floor was slippery and wet. "Crowfur! Hollywish!" He growled and kept his balance on the slippery glace under his paws. "Take Coalstorm to Echoleaf's den for her kitting. I'm going to tell Skystar." ordered Icepelt as he quickly galloped to the leader's den.
The queen yowled in pain. Both warriors planted themselves beside her and marched their way over to the medicine cat den. Their paws sunk deep into the puddles of melted snow as they guided Coalstorm inside.
A glossy black she-cat turned around and her eyes shot open. "Coalstorm!" She turned back and darted into her den, searching for kitting materials. Soon returned Echoleaf with multiple sheets of thick moss -enough for an elder to sleep on- and a stick. She placed the branch carefully in the queen's mouth and slid a moss sheet under her flank.
Icepelt bust into the den, his muzzle gasped for air, but that didn't stop him from running to his mate's side. He licked his rasp tongue over her head calmingly.
"Kit number one!" meowed Echoleaf with a smile, wrapping the first kit into another sheet of moss. It was a she-kit. Her underbelly was matted with cloud white fur, but her pelt was a dark, smoky grey. "And kit number two!" she slid out a white she-kit with a black-tipped tail. She looked like her father, Icepelt. Her eyes were glued shut and she didn't make a sound. Echoleaf held the kit in her paws. She gazed down at the white kit and knew the unfortunate news that would have to be shed.
Coalstorm sighed in relief and gazed at her two kits that were bundled up together. A smile crept up her face at them. She felt warmth run through her veins even though they sat still in the snow.
The white warrior rubbed his nose against hers. He purred loudly and looked over at the two warriors who stood by the entrance. Hollywish and Crowfur sat, happily, watching from the fern tunnel. They mewed in appreciation for the new kits.
Echoleaf purred her congratulations to the queen. Her nose touched

Coalstorm's ear respectfully. "I'll take the kits to you when you're settled in the nursery." She meowed, grabbing the bundle of moss-wrapped kits and trotting carefully into her den. Her black tail finally disappeared after a moment.
Coalstorm sighed. "Hollywish, can you help me up? I want to get to the nursery as fast as possible." She mewed and tried pushing herself up.
The dark warrior caught her. She smiled and looked at Icepelt. She waited for his approval to take on his mate for now. He nodded and stood back to give them space to move out of the den. Hollywish marched by the queen's side as they passed Crowfur and slipped into the ferns. The Tom watched silently and he dipped his head when they passed.
Icepelt trotted swiftly after them. He didn't want anything to happen to his mate. Worry filled his eyes as he ran after them.
"Icepelt!" Echoleaf called from behind.
The white warrior spun around and stood in the brambles. "Yes, Echoleaf?" he looked at the medicine cat with clouded eyes.
Her black head lowered. "I must speak to you, now." She turned and padded to her den. The concerned breaths of Icepelt let her know he was following close behind.
When they arrived in the den, Echoleaf turned around to face the queen's mate. "I'm sorry, Icepelt. One of your kits didn't make it..." She meowed with a sad expression. Her tail curled around her sitting body.
Icepelt's happiness faded. His worry got stronger and he hung his head. A sad cry escaped his muzzle as he fell onto his haunches. His underbelly hit the floor and he placed his face in his paws.
"Echoleaf, you must be lying!" He looked at the she-cat with eyes that showed only the heartbrokenness inside him.
The medicine cat looked at the floor. "I am truly sorry. I feel so bad. Nothing like this has ever happened before..." She spoke tenderly with an understanding temper.
The warrior kept his face in his paws as Crowfur came into the den. "What's the matter?" He looked down at the sobbing Tom-cat that was shaking his head.
"Only one of the two kits made it." Echoleaf explained, her voice was still soft with compassion.
Crowfur hung his head. "I'm sorry, Icepelt." He sighed and turned out of the den. His tail hung low in sorrow for his friend and he

padded into the fern tunnel on his way out.
"What am I going to tell Coalstorm?" His yellow eyes peeked out of his tear-wetted paws at the medicine cat. She just stared at him for a moment, then shook her head. "One kit. I don't think a queen has ever just raised one kit." Icepelt purred lightly. Maybe they'd be the first.
Echoleaf sensed a little bit of delight in his words. She smiled at his gesture and laid down, wrapping her tail around the live moss-covered kit. She lifted her nose to smell the air, feeling the warmth of the kit beside her. "I think Coalstorm is ready for you." The medicine cat meowed and nosed the Tom's kit over to him.
Icepelt looked at the bundle and slowly bent his neck to pick her up. His jaws clamped lightly down on her and he lifted. Icepelt flicked his tail as a goodbye and padded his way out of the medicine cat's den.
In the nursery, Coalstorm watched him walk over from inside. She purred a welcome and waited for him to place the kits in front of her. "I love you, Icepelt." She mewed.
The white Tom placed the kit on her front paws. "What should we name her?" He gazed lovingly at his new daughter as he sat down.
"I thought we had two kits?" She looked worriedly at her mate.
Icepelt sighed. "The other didn't make it..." He bent down and touched noses with Coalstorm comfortingly and gently.
"But-" The black queen stopped and looked at her only kit. Her purr grew stronger as she gazed at the grey bundle. "She shall be named Smokekit, after the cold breaths we take in leafbare."

Two sunrises passed. Morning light peered through the nursery den. The small grey kit had her head up. She looked outside with narrowed eyes. Her pelt was snugged up in her mother's fur. Snow poured in and melted quickly by the heat of the cats inside. Smokekit closed her eyes and laid down again. She suckled quietly by herself under her mother's scent.
A white Tom snuck into the den. His silent pawsteps crawled across the floor, unnoticed. He lowered his head and rubbed his nose against the queen's. "She's beautiful, like you." whispered the Tom-cat.
The queen opened her eyes slowly and lifted her head from the dust floor. "She gets her eyes from you." She looked over at Smokekit who was nursing peacefully.

The warrior dipped his head in agreement. "That's true," he purred, not knowing what to say next.
Smokekit finally lifted her head to look at her father. Her green eyes gazed at him gratefully. She used her tiny paws to lift her small body and wobble her way over to the white warrior. A purr rumbled out of her throat as Smokekit pressed her forehead against his arm.
"Hello, Smokekit." The warrior meowed with a well-held admired look and touched noses with her.
The kit looked back at him with glittering eyes. She purred some more and pushed her pelt against his flank. "You're my daddy?" She asked sweetly.
"Yes," he answered, smiling. "My name is Icepelt, and yours is Smokekit." Icepelt twitched his ear and looked at the queen who was watching them quietly. "And this is your mother, Coalstorm." He added.
The black she-cat purred. "Hello, Smokekit." She meowed to her new kit.
Smokekit's jaws opened widely, showing her tiny kit teeth. Then clamped back together, sealing them away. Her dark fur ruffled as she marched her way back to her mother's underbelly. She lay herself down, purring, but otherwise soundless.
"I love her." Icepelt let his eyes adore the small clump of grey fur. He bent down and laid beside his mate. With a touch of his nose, the queen put her head on her paws.

Chapter 1

Smokekit laid with wide eyes until she sprung up. She looked around the room until she reached the nursery door. Narrowing her eyes, she made out the figure of Skystar -the leader of CloudClan- by her den on the other side of the clearing. The leader was talking to her father, Icepelt. Smokekit twitched her ear curiously as she crawled out of her mother's grasp and padded towards them.
The clearing was bright with sunlight although it was spread with cold, wet ice. Water trickled into her damp grey fur and made her shiver. She stopped about a fox length away and sat down on a dry patch where no water could reach. Her ears pinned up but twisted back as she listened to what they were saying.
Skystar looked around, she sensed the kit who was spying. The leader flicked her tail at Smokekit but kept her eyes on Icepelt. "So, Icepelt, have you heard of the new monster that has been eating kits?" She meowed, smiling at him and twisting her eyes to Smokekit.
The white warrior was confused at first, but then saw his kit leaning in to hear more. "Yes, I have. Apparently it likes gray-furred ones the most!" Icepelt chuckled, but little Smokekit could not detect the laughter in his voice.
"You better keep an eye on your Smokekit." The leader told him with a flinch of her ear. "She might be gobbled!" Skystar mewed, her eyes narrowed as she tilted her head slightly in suspiciousness of the kit's interest of their conversation.
Smokekit gasped to herself and bounced up. Her tiny paws moved her quickly towards the nursery. A kit-gobbler! She thought before noticing Icepelt trotting after her. With a halt, she spun around and glared at him. Her fur bristled instantly.
Icepelt shook his head with a smile. "No need to be alarmed, Smokekit." He told her as he leaned over and licked her fur down. "Skystar and I were only kidding. We saw you coming as soon as you sat down." Icepelt purred in amusement.
The grey she-kit held her tail up high and sat down. She continued to glare at him in distrust and uncertainty. "I knew that." Smokekit mewed and licked her chest.

Her father's face was twisted. She could tell he couldn't read her emotions well.
"Whats the matter, Icepelt?" She smirked in satisfaction of her slight revenge. "Cat got your tongue?" Smokekit mewed victoriously and got up. Her self-smile grew at the white warrior as she turned around, giving him a last glare, and padded into the ferns to the nursery.
Skystar marched her way to Icepelt. "Someday, she'll make a fine warrior. But her momentary obedience will have to be constructed into full-time obedience as soon as possible to guide her in the same direction as a fine warrior like you."
Icepelt purred at the leader's compliment. He knew not every warrior or cat was complemented by the leader. "It will be up to her apprenticing mentor to deal with that. I wish him or her good luck!"
The leader chuckled. "You better be getting to her," she meowed. "She's probably getting into some mischief now." Skystar turned to the nursery entrance to see Smokekit standing with bristled fur.
"I do not need to work on obedience! I'm plenty good at a lot of things, I don't need warriors telling me what to do!" Smokekit huffed and arched her back on the way back inside. Why couldn't they just mind their business? Smokekit growled under her breath. Her tail disappeared into the ferns that led her in towards her mother. "Icepelt and Skystar are being mean!" wined Smokekit.
She scoffed with an irritated look when the white warrior emerged from the outside to in. Her tail shot up as she fell down to suckle her mother.
Coalstorm looked down at her with an unreadable expression. "Smokekit, I think it's time you stop acting like such a kit." She meowed and bit her lip, clearly not wanting to hear her response.
The gray kit ignored her mother and flicked her tail angrily. She rolled around until she was comfortable in her mother's grasp.
"She'll never listen..." The black queen mumbled with a weary look as she switched her gaze to meet Icepelt.
To her surprise, the Tom's eyes were fixed on Smokekit who was nursing herself at her mother's underbelly. "Skystar said she has to be more obedient." reported Icepelt to the kit's mother. He narrowed his eyes as Smokekit's head bobbed up.
"She's wrong!" Smokekit spat back at him.
Icepelt hissed at his kin, "Not according to Skystar."
The grey she-kit glared at her father and put her tail up. "Skystar is

wrong!" She yowled again. Her short grey fur bristled in Coalstorm's paws. "Who is she to tell you I'm not obedient enough? I'm the most brave and courageous cat this Clan has ever seen, and I'll prove it to you!" Smokekit's claws unsheathed as she marched angrily out of the nursery and into the clearing. Her head popped out of the fern tunnel and her tail disappeared from the inside of the nursery. She looked around, anger spread her face as she hung her head and padded along the sidelines of campus.
Lionstripe, a massive-pawed brown-striped yellow-furred warrior Tom-cat, bumped into her by accident. "Greetings, Smokekit! What are you doing outside the nur-"
He stopped in mid-sentence when Smokekit shot him a glare. With a sorrowful look, the grey she-kit's eyes turned from angry to worried.. "Oh, sorry Lionstripe." Smokekit apologized. "I didn't mean to," she mewed and hung her head again.
"It's okay, Smokekit. What are you doing out of the nursery?" The tall pale warrior asked, peering down into her eyes with his friendly green eyes.
Smokekit sighed. Her head shook as she felt a small feeling of happiness that it was Lionstripe who ran into her, instead of Skystar. She would have been so upset and probably would have ran away with a heavier heartache than now. "Skystar doubts my loyalty and obedience skills." Smokekit told him. "Just because I'm more impatient, at least that's why I think so..." Her voice trailed off as her eyes follow up to Lionstripe's.
The warrior gazed at her. "I'm sure she still cares about you like she does with all the other cats in CloudClan." meowed Lionstripe with a smile.
"Yeah right." The gray kit muttered. But it's against the warrior code to not be loyal and obedient!
Lionstripe purred affectionately and nuzzled the kit's gray flank with his nose. "You'll be okay, I promise. I'm going on a hunting patrol later with Hollywish, do you want to come to get your mind off things?" He asked with a warm-hearted smile.
"Would I ever!" Smokekit purred with joy. Her bright eyes met Lionstripe's caring gaze. "You're the best, Lionstripe!" She meowed to him as she padded a mouse length to his leg until she had to look up to meet his eyes.
The warrior smiled and pressed his nose against Smokekit's. "Glad to hear so." He purred.

A gust of evening wind flew over Smokekit as she watched a black she-cat standing at the edge of the clearing near the gorse tunnel that led out of the camp. The black-furred warrior sat, lapping at her paw until Lionstripe started walking towards her.
The big Tom-cat flicked his tail in greeting about a fox-length away from her. He sat beside her and looked around, probably wondering where Smokekit was.
Her fluffy gray head bobbed as she gazed out of the nursery at him. Finally, she climbed out of the ferns and padded toward the two.
"Hi Lionstripe! Hi Hollywish!"
"Hello Smokekit." Hollywish purred, getting to her paws right away. She whipped her long fur around as she headed for the tunnel. Lionstripe gave Smokekit a small nudge on the flank and let her go first.
The kit stumbled softly onto her front paws and looked back up at him with glowing green eyes. "Can I follow?" mewed Smokekit, swishing her grey tail across the dust floor.
"Sure, but stay close." The warrior said. His keen eye shown her all the dangers in the forest. "In this time of early newleaf, prey is just coming back. That means predators will be coming back, too." Lionstripe warned.
Smokekit gazed up at him, shocking to see how worried he was. But she had faith in him, for he was the only cat she truly trusted. "I promise." She meowed sincerely, "Lead the way." Her tail stuck high above her head as Lionstripe stode slowly in front of her, guiding the path through the bramble tunnel.
Water sunk into her fur as she padded through, lifting her head and smelling for prey. "Lionstripe!" Smokekit whispered as she flicked her tail over to a root where a vole scurried under the branches.
"Nice job, Smokekit. Now, watch how its done." The pale warrior dropped into a hunting crouch. His underbelly skidded the snow-melted water as he crept over slowly.
Then, droplets of ice flung up into the air and Lionstripe landed swiftly on the vole and swiped it into the air as he darted towards it just before it landed. In one claw slice, it was dead. A couple heartbeats later, Lionstripe turned to face the gazing kit and held the round-mouthed mouse in his jaws. His powerful paws stomped up to her and placed it before her paws. "Rule number one of the warrior code; Never eat until the Clan in fed first." meowed Lionstripe strictly.

The grey she-kit turned her eyes from the delicious-smelling vole to Lionstripe's eyes. He had clearly taken this rule seriously, so, so did Smokekit. "May I ask," She mewed sincerely, not wanting any trouble. "Why?"
"Because," Lionstipe explained in clearly laid out detail, "When you were born into the Clan, one of the roles as a Clancat is that you must feed others before yourself. This is called selflessness. Do you understand, young one?" He purred, lapping at her gray-furred head.
Smokekit sat and thought for a bit, If I caught it, I should be able to eat it myself, She wondered to herself. But soon, Smokekit realized that to be able to be an awesome -as she described it- warrior like Lionstripe, she would have to obey the Warrior Code. "Yes, Lionstripe." She mewed sincerely. Smokekit thought the Warrior Code was a hard code to follow, but maybe someday she'll get the hang of it.
The pale warrior bent down and touched noses with the grey kit before he turned to trudge off after Hollywish, who was a little bit further ahead. Smokekit heard her growl at him impatiently when he tramped loudly over her prey and it scurried away. "Lionstripe!" Hollywish hissed at him playfully, ignoring the fact that he had startled her prey. The Tom reacted with a giggle and not further after, she started to tease him with petty insults. "You mouse-brain!" The wind almost blocked out the black she-cat's voice, but it wasn't soundless. Especially since her ears were her best weapon. Smokekit moved slowly up the side of the ravine, following Lionstripe's scent marks and the playful scorns from the two cats not far from where she prowled. With a peek over some green-leafed bush, Smokekit saw something she hadn't before.
Lionstripe was on top of Hollywish and her paws where batting at his ears. This isn't fighting..? Smokekit thought, ducking down, out of sight, but high enough to have a small glance through the berries.

Chapter 2

The two were scrambling over each other. Their claws were sheathed and it made Smokekit confused. She wondered if this was what the Clan called 'fighting'. If so, then why don't the Clans just unite together and fight like this all the time? She wondered, suspiciously narrowing her eyes at the jaws that clamped over Hollywish's scruff. Lionstripe didn't seem to be hurting her at all, and she didn't seem offended or angry.
With a huff of aggrevation, Smokekit jumped over the leaves and landed proudly in front of the two cats. "Lionstipe, that's not how you attack a feline." She cocked her head as if sounding confused, but her main emotion was aggravated. Smokekit had always relied on Lionstripe to be there for her. She knew that if they became mates, like she saw other cats do, there would be no time for her in his life.
When none of the two answered her, irritation caught her mind in place right away. Her facial expression turned to angry as she watched hatefully at Hollywish and how she enjoyed the company of Lionstripe so much.
Finally, Smokekit snapped. She jumped furiously onto the she-cat and grasped her tiny teeth ahold of Hollywish's long black fur. Lionstripe let them free and he tumbled sideways, keeping his horizontal balance on the matted grass. "Smokekit!" He growled, snatching his jaws onto the gray she-kit's scruff.
Surprisingly to Smokekit, Hollywish got right up, as if not being tackled at all. Lionstripe lapped at her shoulder and nuzzled her neck soothingly.
"I wasn't hurt, Lionstipe." Hollywish reassured him, even though it was clearly visible that she was completely fine. "Smokekit is probably just used to your attention on her." She looked with a smile at the gray kit who had been set on the soft grass floor.
The kit hissed. Her fur bristled then lay flat again. Despise for this unwanted she-cat was all she could think of. Hollywish was out to get her place, and Smokekit didn't like it.

When all three cats returned to the clearing, Smokekit headed for

the nursery. Her head was hanging low in frustration. Lionstripe and Hollywish were being lovey-dovey the whole walk back. Smokekit found it extremely boring and a waste of her time. Although she tried to picture herself doing something better than walking beside Lionstripe who was nosing Hollywish instead of her. Coalstorm greeted her with a meow of delight to see her daughter back home. "How was your-"

"Horrible!" Smokekit answered as she stopped in the nursery entrance before her mother could finish. She tried to think of a word for her feelings of hatred for Hollywish, but could find none in her short kit-memory vocabulary. "Lionstripe found himself a mate, and now he has no time for me! He caught one mouse in front of me, then I watched him nuzzle with Hollywish for the rest of the time." Smokekit huffed and let out a low growl, glancing back at the two who had just now made it back to the clearing.

Her mother was clearly surprised by Smokekit's sudden despise. "Is it because you're jealous?" Coalstorm mewed, not trying to sound mean, but trying to comfort the angry look of her daughter.

"No!" Smokekit spat.

Coalstorm gave a sudden smile, "I have a secret for you, Smokekit. I'm sure it will solve all of your problems." She meowed. Her eyes glowing with excitement and glory.

Interested, Smokekit leaned in, her ear pricked up to listen to her mother's soft words.

"You're going to be a sister."

A slow breeze travelled across the damp new-leaf room as Smokekit's jaw dropped instantly, hearing the soft whisper of her mother's tone in her peachy ear. "Are you mouse-brained?! That doesn't make anything better! Now I won't be able to talk to you either!" Her tail whipped angrily back and forth and her battling criticizement finally came to an end.

With a final glare, Smokekit turned and darted out of the nursery angrily. Her eyes glued to the floor as she ran across the clearing, hoping to run into Lionstripe. Then, she remembered that he will probably already have Hollywish with him. She growled when she bumped into a figure in front of her. "Hey!" Smokekit hissed and looked up.

Above her was Lionstripe. His green eyes glowed in the sudden sunlight and a smile lit up his face. "Hello Smokekit!" He gazed at her, but was surprised to see her already galloping away. When this

gesture had happened, Lionstripe started after her. His pelt ruffled in the wind as they began the chase. It wasn't hard for him to catch up because of her tiny legs that slowed her down. "Smokekit, why are you running away from me?"
The gray she-kit whirled around and let out a hiss as he came to a halt in front of her. She was not happy with him since this morning, after he had ignored her to spend time with Hollywish. Smokekit turned to start her racing again.
"Smokekit!" Lionstripe growled, loudly and angrily. Smokekit could sense the worry that mingled with anger now that she was about two fox-lengths away.
She instantly looked back, fright painted her face as her brows drooped and Lionstripe started padding up to her. Surprisingly, he stopped about a rabbit-length away from her, making Smokekit feel uncomfortable in every way.
First, he had ignored her. Second, he had yelled at her when she didn't want to talk. Third, he had used her uncomforts to make her feel bad.
Angry with Lionstripe, she bristled her fur. "Why dont you go comfort your precious mate, Hollywish?!" She spat, although sadness clouded her eyes. Now, she had lost two friends, and Hollywish was not one of them.

Chapter 3

Shocked by this expression, Lionstripe sighed and stretched his tail around Smokekit's upper neck, slowly laying down her bristled fur as he pulled her closer. "Why would I do that?" He lapped at her head lovingly.
Smokekit's head swirled. Her anger was still crawling through her bloodshot veins. "Because you care more about her." She said, lowering her head but remaining filled with hatred towards the dumb black she-cat who had stolen her best friend's heart.
"You are irreplaceable to me." He meowed reassuringly to the jealous grey kit. He must have noticed the downing look on Smokekit's face. "What else is the matter, Smokekit?" Lionstripe asked, tipping his head to the side.
She looked up to see his worried face gazing down at her. "My mother..." Smokekit started, not knowing whether or not to tell Lionstripe what had happened to her mother. Coalstorm had been impregnated again and was going to start her kitting in a few moons. Smokekit didn't even know until today. It wouldnt be fair to tell someone who had just ignored her all morning a secret whom her mother had just told her personally. "She, uh..." Smokekit finally met his eyes and spat it out quickly, "Coalstorm has started her kitting again. She is due in a few moons and I didn't even know until today!" She growled and turned her head to face the floor.
Lionstripe wrapped his furry pale sand-coloured tail around her body and paws. "Why didnt you tell her that you felt that way?" Lionstripe suggested mildly. "I'm sure she would be fine about it." He smiled at the grey kit and nuzzled her gently.
Smokekit gazed up at him. Her tail flicked nervously. "But she..." Stopping in her tracks, Smokekit shook her head. Delicately, she dropped to a hang of the head and mumbled, "I don't trust her." Smokekit told him, finally standing up straight. "And you shouldn't either."
Surprised by this, the pale warrior swayed back a minnow-length. "Smokekit!" Lionstripe stood up too and a small rumble started down in his throat. "You have no right to tell me who to love! You're a kit. Get back to the nursery before I-"

The gray kit had already began tear-shedding. She instantly turned and started to gallop away. Her paws running as fast as they could take the little body. "I don't need him..." Smokekit told herself, slowing down her steady pace. She glanced back. In her heart hoping he'd be there behind her, ready to apologize. But her head told the truth; Her tearing emerald green eyes scanned the sun-fallen woodlands. There was no sign of Lionstripe. No sign of hope... at all.

As another tear rolled down Smokekit's gray cheek, she fell to her paws and made a huff of wet dirt sink into her sadness-drenched fur. She could feel her heart aching, racing, and somehow, not even giving a beat anymore. Paws sucked over her muzzle, as Smokekit felt a touch on her side. She instantly popped up, growling, as if thinking it was Lionstripe.
It wasn't. A drop of water bolted through the sky and onto her pelt. As she realised this, more drops fell from the clouded -and clouding still- above land.
Deeply poor and upset, the grey she-kit sighed and let another tear roll of her cheek. Smokekit shook her head and sat down, hanging her head near her paws. "Why do I bother?" She mewed to herself. Feeling helpless, Smokekit fell to the ground again. This time, her head hit the floor painfully. It struck her hard, as her head bashed into the wet dirt carelessly. It was also hard enough to force her into a coma, sleeping until woken by the only cat Smokekit wanted it to be; Lionstripe.
As she slept, her thoughts were corrupted by hatred and only self-obedience. Smokekit's ugly thoughts told her no one was to be trusted. Especially with this new kit -or kits- on its way, no one would be around to talk to, play with, or chat with.
None of the other kits from the nursery were old enough to play outside with Smokekit. She knew -as her thoughts had told her- the only way to get out of this without shedding another tear, would be to either; Befriend Hollywish and accept that Lionstripe would always choose love over their friendship, or befriend this kit and take out all the cats who once abandoned her.
To Smokekit, the choice was clear; She had to make this new kit her best sister friend and destroy anyone who gets in the way.
'Dark thinking for a kit', Smokekit thought through the tough barrel of a coma. That's what Lionstripe would say.

Pain was but a sudden ease at the thought of her lost friend. Smokekit could not recall the last sight of relief in her short time of a life she had already lived, but it was enough to know what this dark forest is capable of, and what it's really like-including the cats inside.

Wind whirled around in the cold air as another breathless tear rolled down the grey fur. The frozen kit lay on the damp floor, upset by the previous memories and motions. But a sudden call made Smokekit's ear twitch curiously. Her sadly painted face glanced up from her wet paws.
The cat who had called was in front of a bright beam of light. The sun, Smokekit guessed. But who could be the one casting that shadow? Her eyes narrowed at the oddly shaped object.
As Smokekit got to her paws weakly. She wanted to know who it was, but her throat was caught in a bundle. "W-who are you?" Smokekit finally stuttered out loud.
The cat turned. Long black fur whipped around. Blazing emerald green eyes shone brightly through the rays of sun.
Familiar of this friendly face, Smokekit's isolated felt face was drowned of sadness, and instantly lit up with pure happiness.
"Echoleaf!" The grey she-kit galloped over to the medicine cat and smiled.
"Smokekit! Where are you?" Echoleaf lapped at the kit's furry head gently and comfortingly.
Confused, the she-kit looked up at Echoleaf. Both of her green eyes met the medicine cat's. "What are you talking about? I'm right here!"
"I know," Echoleaf nuzzled Smokekit warmly. "The whole Clan has been looking for you for the past five moonhighs!" She explained, scanning the kit's grey fur. "Are you... dead?" Echoleaf wrapped her tail around the kit, preparing herself for the response.
Smokekit pulled back, "No!" she growled. "Do you think I'm not good enough to care for myself on my own? Because I can!" Backing up, her eyes dropped to her paws doubtfully. She had never been disrespectful to a medicine cat before.
The medicine cat shook her head through barrels of tough wind. Smokekit could see that there was a hint of sorrow in her eyes too.
"I would never say that to you," she started softly. "The Clan is worried that some other Clan had stole you, or a fox snatched you

up. Lionstripe was the last to see you, and some cats are starting to assume he killed you."
"Maybe it'll teach him a lesson," Smokekit mumbled to herself.
"Smokekit!" Echoleaf hissed.
"Okay, okay, sorry." The grey she-kit apologized. But it was his fault; Lionstripe acted so mean and careless towards her earlier.
Smokekit growled to herself for a moment, but then stopped thinking about it and pushed the subject aside. "But if you are in my dreams..." Smokekit thought. "Are you dead?"
Echoleaf stared blankly. The light was crowding her shadow. "No, Smokekit. You are in my dream." She started to stutter in fright. "The only question is; how?"
Moments passed with no answers. The two cats hung their heads low, near their paws, thinking of what could be happening. But no one came up with a solution.
It was silent for many short minutes until Smokekit spoke, her voice rusty with short-temper and fear. "I ran out into the rogue lands," Smokekit started, not bearing to glance up at Echoleaf's fully horror-painted -and very worried- facial expression.
"I didn't mean to! It was Lionstripe that chased me out!" As the words slipped out, the lie was hidden in Smokekit's eyes and it was not visible to Echoleaf at all.
Of course, the medicine cat couldn't believe it. Smokekit saw the confusion that was quickly drawn from the black-furred cat's face and spirals of disbelief overflowed in her eyes.
Lying to a medicine cat was pure sin. It was against the warrior code, and it was pure disrespect to StarClan. But now, Smokekit couldn't turn back. Lionstripe would get in trouble for this, and she knew it. It would be revenge all over again. For the second time; and he deserved it. The pain he had put her through by showing how he loved another and ignored her for it.
Smokekit growled bitterly, but she bit down hard on her lip. She tried not to show Echoleaf the hatred she had for Lionstripe's new mate and her ways of changing him into the cruel cat he is now.
"That can't be," Echoleaf stated fiercely.
A medicine cat cannot fight back against a warrior; it was the warrior code and the ways of StarClan. But it was clear that this medicine cat was not afraid of Smokekit. It feared her.
As a true warrior, Smokekit followed the rule and bit back her response. But she let out a shaky sigh and pushed her forehead into

Echoleaf's arm gently.
"Smokekit," The black she-cat meowed as a start, "Lionstripe is not trying to hurt you by being mates with Hollywish."
"How do you know that?!" The kit snapped at her, breaking the code she had learned from her short moons in the forest so far. But then Smokekit took a breath in and said briefly, "It's not Lionstripe I'm worried about."
Echoleaf, surprised, leaned in to hear more. Her interest was slim, but it was there.
Continuing, Smokekit was more worried about breaking the promise of friendship to Lionstripe than disobeying the warrior code. She kept silent now, knowing there was nothing left to say; unless she were to lie. But that would get Lionstripe in more trouble than ever, and that's not what Smokekit wanted. She wanted Hollywish to disappear and never return. It was dark, but so true.
With feelings pure, Smokekit looked up at the medicine cat who was waiting desperately for a response. Then she felt it. The silence was starting to shake, and the light behind the black she-cat started to burn out. The whole forest was throbbing and only Smokekit knew why.
"Goodbye Echoleaf," She backed up and sat, watching the medicine cat be sucked into the last drop of light there was.
After that, everything was hushed. Smokekit felt herself being pulled down. She let the feeling go and her neck was instantly pulled to the damp floor.

Chapter 4

"Smokekit?!" A voice from above shouted. "Smokekit, wake up!!" The cat hissed, worry was hinted in their voice.
The grey she-kit opened her eyes slowly and looked up. It was Crowfur; a black Tom-cat with flaming yellow-orange eyes. "C-Crowfur?" She groaned and sat up, dazed by the sudden sunlight.
"Oh, thank StarClan." The black Tom said out loud and turned his head, "Icepelt! She's here!"
In an instant, Smokekit's father appeared over her. His tongue rasped over her forehead gently.
"Smokekit, are you okay? What happened to you?" Crowfur asked, wrapping his tail around her small grey-furred body.
Icepelt shot him a glare and picked Smokekit up by the scruff. He started trotting towards the hunting grounds. "I'll bring her to Echoleaf," Icepelt paused and scanned Crowfur with worried eyes; he had just found his daughter in rogue grounds untouched. "Don't waste a heartbeat standing there; go find some fresh kill. I'm sure Skystar would be thankful." The white warrior muffled through Smokekit's scruff as he started trotting away.
Smokekit reopened her eyes and turned her eyes up to him. "Let go of me, you grump!"
Startled by this sudden attack, Icepelt dropped her and glared at his daughter. "You can't talk to me like that, missy! Get back to camp, your legs work fine!" He growled.
Not giving a response, Smokekit hissed at her father and spun around, lashing her side from side to side. She gave a short wonder of why Icepelt was so mad at her, but Crowfur was very worried. She also wondered about how the rest of the Clan react when she returned.

Icepelt trotted beside Smokekit with his head hanging low by his paws. His claws were unsheathed. It scared Smokekit.
As they neared the CloudClan entrance, Smokekit started galloping. Icepelt's paws were pounding on the floor and they got closer to Smokekit with every hit on the damp grass.
They started racing into the camp. Icepelt's teeth bared as Smokekit

started running faster. The two skimmed the fern entrance and came to a halt in the clearing.
Icepelt was breathing heavy, but not as much as Smokekit. Her sides were heaving uncontrollably, but that didn't stop her from dipping her head when Skystar raced out of her den to greet them.
"Echoleaf!" The leader shouted. A few heartbeats after, Skystar bent down and touched noses with the kit.
The medicine cat slipped out of the brambles that led from her den and darted towards them. She carefully picked Smokekit up by the scruff and trotted back to her den.
Smokekit saw cats appearing from the inside of their dens. It didn't worry her, but it made her feel ashamed. No cat should be put down like this, especially in front of a crowd.
"StarClan forbid I walk on my own!" Smokekit growled out loud so Echoleaf would put her down.
To her surprise, the medicine cat ignored her and kept her tracking on. Smokekit skinned the floor as Echoleaf ducked into the brambles. She dropped her off on a moss bed and turned to grab some herbs.
"Why is everyone so mad at me?" Smokekit asked. I 's true, she was fairly confused about what was going on.
When no response came from the black she-cat, Echoleaf turned worriedly. "It's okay, everything will be alright soon. Don't be worried, my love." She gave Smokekit a lap on the head and quickly wrapped her neck in cobwebs. It was certainly not enough to choke the kit, but enough to put a small amount of pressure.
"What? I'm fine!" Smokekit hissed at the medicine cat at once.
Echoleaf turned with a sack of leaves in her jaws and she set them in front of Smokekit. "I don't need cobwebs or any of your foul-tasting herbs!" The kit spat, desperately trying to get Echoleaf's attention.
But there was no answer. It ticked Smokekit off, she wanted to snap her jaws on something hard. Then, her stomach churned. Smokekit's eyes rolled back into her head and she fell onto her side; eyes fluttering to a close.

Chapter 5

When Smokekit awoke, the medicine cat den was empty. In fact, Smokekit believed she wasn't even in the medicine cat den anymore. Her eyes opened slowly and her head bobbed up. As she got a better look, Smokekit saw that she was no longer in Echoleaf's den, she was in the nursery. But no other cats were there.
Then, Smokekit's ear flicked at a sound from the outside. She glanced out at the Highrock, where she heard Skystar addressing the Clan of the newest Clan news. Smokekit was curious, so she got up and padded outside. She was shocked by the amount of cats that we're going worriedly up at the leader as she spoke loudly.
Skystar was yowling, but not loud enough for Smokekit to hear her words. She crept forward, listening to the cats chatter, even though it was a meeting; as Skystar would have said earlier 'All cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather here beneath the Highrock for a Clan meeting.' Smokekit was not yet old enough to catch her own prey, but she attended the meeting.
"Echoleaf has shared information with me as to having a dream of Smokekit. This kit has been in the medicine cat's dream and StarClan has shared, with Echoleaf, that Smokekit will soon lead a prophecy of her own." Skystar said, her eyes were sternly gazing at her Clanmates.
More meows of disturbance blurted out eagerly from the Clancats. They were clearly uttering of disparity at the cause of Smokekit's prophecy.
Could this be true?, Smokekit thought worriedly. She could have her own prophecy! That would be so scary, and exciting at the same time. She gazed up at Bluesong, who was sitting beside Skystar who was still giving details on the news.
Bluesong was looking at her gently. His dazzling blue eyes were locked on hers. Smokekit wondered why he was looking at her and no other cats were.
But then Skystar continued louder than before, "In other words, Coalstorm is to have her new kits at half moon; meaning after a few more sunhighs from now." The leader glanced at her paws, then back at the crowd of CloudClan cats. "That is all. Meeting

dismissed."
Smokekit watched as the leader jumped down from the Highrock and padded across the clearing, towards the nursery. She stood a few fox-lengths away from the entrance, but Skystar did not seem to notice. Coalstorm must be in the medicine cat's den, if she is to start kitting soon, Smokekit suggested to herself.
She had just started walking after Skystar into the nursery when Hollywish appeared around the other corner of the nursery. It seemed she was coming out of the medicine cat den, but she tried to make it seem not-so obvious. The black she-cat looked around suspiciously, and Smokekit felt like she was hiding something.
A heartbeat after that, Bluesong appeared and he started after Hollywish. The two trotted for Skystar, who was peering into the empty nursery that was now flooding with queens and kits.
"Skystar," Bluesong started, sitting beside the leader quietly. "Hollywish has brought news to my attention that cannot be left undiscussed."
When the Tom received no answer, he added, "We will wait for you outside your den." Then, Bluesong and Hollywish padded off towards the leader's den.
Hollywish gave a sudden glance at Lionstripe, who was sitting outside the warriors den gazing back at her. Smokekit let a rumble of a growl out of her throat before chasing after them.

Skystar had finally arrived, and the black she-cat was staring at her the whole time she took to walk over. "Lionstripe and I would like to request your permission to be mates." HollyLeaf stated with her chin high.
Moved, the leader nodded her head and replied with a simple statement, "Permission granted."
Smokekit growled again, but stopped when she noticed Bluesong's eyes were not on the leader. He was looking back at her. His gentle blue eyes filled with curiosity.
"Bluesong," Skystar snapped after Hollywish pranced off to tell Lionstripe the 'good' news. "You have not been yourself today. What's the matter?"
Bluesong turned his head at Skystar and meowed, "I am worried about little Smokekit." The deputy closed his eyes and sighed, "What if she cannot handle this new kit? We both know Coalstorm only has the ability to process one kit at a time; Therefore, how will

Smokekit cope with that kind of rejection? All the cats will surely ignore her, including Lionstripe who used to be her best friend. He now has a mate!"
Surprised, the leader shook her head. "StarClan does not lie about prophecies, Bluesong. Nor do they lie to medicine cats. She will handle it fine. But I still am sorry this new kit of yours will not grow up with his or her real grandparents. You would have made a great grandfather, Bluesong."
"Thank you, Skystar." he bowed his head in sorrow. "That means a lot coming from you."
Smokekit wondered what that could mean-Could Bluesong and Coalstorm's mother be mates? How was that even possible? These thoughts were rudely interrupted by Lionstripe galloping across the clearing. "Smokekit!" He yowled, coming to a dust-blowing halt in front of her. "Where have you been?!"
"Out." She mewed ignorantly in his face.
Lionstripe remembered that she was mad at him for something, then he backed off.
"Smokekit?! My kit!!" Coalstorm raced out of the nursery to meet the grey-furred she-kit. She instantly rasped her pink tongue against Smokekit's forehead. "It's okay, mama's got you now." She meowed softly and grabbed the kit by the scruff, darting back to the nursery entrance where she had been sitting before Lionstripe's yowl.
Smokekit, bouncing from her mother's jaws, shook herself rapidly. But the queen did not let go until they reached the inside where Smokekit had woke up before hearing about her prophecy.
"Stay here, little Smokekit, I'll fetch a mouse for you and I to share." Coalstorm meowed before storming quickly out of the den.
Icepelt was already heading back towards her with a vole when the queen dropped to her paws. "Coalstorm?!" The Tom dropped the scrap of meat and dropped his head at the queen who was now laying on the floor.
Coalstorm squealed in pain, but managed to let out a small cry saying, "Get Echoleaf!"
Not even a heartbeat later, Icepelt had darted the other way, racing across the clearing. Smokekit was now standing at her mother's side. "Coalstorm?" The grey kit mewed softly in question.
She got no answer but more desperate cries of agony. Smokekit saw Skystar poke her head out of her den and watch as two warriors - Crowfur and Jaystep, Smokekit guessed- ran out of their dens to

help the queen over Echoleaf.
Smokekit got to her paws and galloped over to the medicine cat who was working quickly, hovering over a moss bed to comfort the queen.
Coalstorm appeared into the gorse tunnel heartbeats later, carried in gently by Crowfur and Jaystep.
They had just set her on the bed when Smokekit felt a tug on her scruff. "You shouldn't be here, little one."
Just by hearing the delicate voice, Smokekit knew it was Doveheart, a beautiful grey she-cat with blue eyes. This cat was known for her delicacy in everything. She was always kind-hearted and high-spirited, but Smokekti knew this had to be the one time she had to kick her out; Coalstorm was kitting, and it was not right to let another kit watch.
Just as Smokekit padded out with her head hanging down, she heard a faint meow. Then, Echoleaf meowed, "It's a she-kit!"

Crowfur and Jaystep walked out and sat patiently in front of Smokekit, blocking her view of the inside.
"You must be so excited!"
Smokekit looked up to see Jaystep's smiling, grey, tabby face. "Yes," She rolled her eyes and continued sarcastically, "I'm so excited to be ignored for the next three moons."
Crowfur shot her a look of disappointment. "You should be glad to have a little sister to look over!" He snapped, but continued in a more friendly tone, "You're already mouse-brained as it is, why don't ya want a sister?" The dark-pelted warrior touched his nose on her forehead.
Smokekit shook her head, denying any new thoughts that might have appeared of this new kit. "No reason," She made up the words as she went, "I just don't want to be left out now, you know?" One lip was slowly drawn up the side of her face in uncertainty.
"I know right!" Jaystep poked his head into the kit's face abruptly. "As soon as Doveheart was born, I was totally kicked out of the spotlight."
As soon as the words slipped out of Jaystep's mouth, Smokekit could see Crowfur step on his paw as he shot a desperate glare at the grey, loud-mouthed cat. "That doesn't help at all, you birdbrain!" Crowfur growled.
"No," Smokekit accepted it, letting out a sigh of slight grief. "I'm

going to have to learn to cope with life one way or another; and this will be the first."
The two stared for a moment, then the silence was broken, "You're pretty mature for your age, little one." Crowfur stated, continuing more serious and conscious, "When will your apprentice ceremony be?"
"Not for a few more moons." Smokekit shook her head and sighed again.
Jaystep, startled, backed out of the way as Doveheart led Coalstorm out of the gorse tunnel and into the clearing. It was clear her kitting was over, and Echoleaf had already given her poppy seeds to ease the pain.
The black queen limped across the clearing with Doveheart until reaching the nursery. Smokekit poked her head in, "Mama?" She meowed sincerely.
"Come in, my little Smokekit." Coalstorm purred in greeting manner. She was laying on a thick bed of moss, and was comfortingly curled up.
Doveheart was just padding out when Smokekit walked in. "You must rest now, Coalstorm," The she-cat warrior said over her shoulder.
Smokekit glanced back at her gratefully, but only thankful for the fact that Doveheart cared for her mother. Otherwise, Smokekit knew she was not some cat that had not yet been truly befriended.
"Yes, Doveheart." She mewed as the friendly warrior passed through the nursery tunnel.
Feeling appreciative, Smokekit felt a massive thrill of surprised at her own emotions. She thought she would feel hatred and despise for this new kit. But now, now that the new kit had been born. Smokekit sorrowed herself for ever feeling that way; For she had not thought of the good this kit might bring. Maybe the newborn would be a great new addition to the Clan's welfare and community.

Chapter 6

The grey kit sat at her mother's side and she bent down to nuzzle the black queen's neck comfortingly. "Mama, where is the new kit?"
"In Echoleaf's den, my little Smokekit." Coalstorm replied but then continued without letting her respond, "Crowfur told me you're worried. What's wrong?"
Smokekit sighed her anger. StarClan forbid every cat of CloudClan didn't share tongues with Crowfur, Smokekit thought bitterly to herself. "I thought it would-"
"It?!" Coalstorm growled at her kin.
"Yes, mother," Smokekit dared to meow, "it."
The queen shook her head and cleared her throat before letting out a startling hiss, "Well, it is your little sister, and you will learn to respect it in every way possible!"
Unexpected of the furious growl her mother bore, Smokekit's eyebrows leaned in and her lips drew back in a snarl of anger. Coalstorm had drawn a new kind of rage into Smokekit's mind, and from the moment it was brought into her mind, she knew she would crave to feel it again.
Then, Smokekit arched her back and drug herself out of the nursery. Her darkly-furred face was painted with irritation. I'll kill it! She yowled to herself darkly in her head.

The she-kit had already pelted across the clearing, making a quick halt at the edge of the sandy floor before darting into the grass and trees.
A voice behind her made her snout turn.
Lionstripe.
The pale warrior was hauling his bulk body across the clearing. His big paws stopped in front of her just before she was about to leave.
"Don't run," Lionstripe meowed in a friendlier tone than the last time he talked to her, "I've given up the chase."
Smokekit whirled around. "You left me in the middle of the rogue lands because you chose Hollywish over me! And now my own mother is going to choose this new monstrosity over me, too!" She spat at the friendly-faced warrior.

"Dont give up on me, Smokekit," Lionstripe's gaze now a mouse length away from Smokekit's muzzle. He continued hastily but softly, "because I would never give up on you. I love you as a best friend, I would never choose anyone over you."
Wind hurled over his voice softly, and Smokekit's eyes were drowned with sorrow, replacing all anger left in her mind with unending regret; Regret, of course, of her false accusations against Hollywish and the situation of her stealing attention from Lionstripe.
But as days went on, Smokekit was still left out. The new kit was announced early the next morning as named Willowkit. All the cats were busy and had no time to play or spend time with Smokekit. Once, Smokekit walked in on Coalstorm nursing Willowkit. That was fine, but her mother had her nose over the new kit comfortingly. She rasped her warm pink tongue over the suckling kit a couple of times before even noticing Smokekit at the entrance to the nursery, standing there filled with bitterness and feeling completely outraged.
Coalstorm never kissed Smokekit when she was as old as the newborn. Coalstorm never comforted her when she squealed, her mother would just hush her with a brush of her long black tail. Her mother would never do anything with Smokekit that she did with Willowkit.
Jealous. Smokekit was extremely jealous. The new kit in CloudClan must be exterminated, or this ignorance against Smokekit might continue...at least, that's what the grey kit thought.
At last, the day came. It was halfway past a full moon since the day Willowkit had been born. The new kit was steady enough to walk and talk on her own; just like Smokekit did when she was younger. But now was not the time to be relating to Willowkit, and Smokekit knew that.
Through the shadows of night, Smokekit sat up in her bed and gazed suspiciously across the nursery. Her ears were flattened, and she was a about to let out a faint snarl before she heard a queen - Whitewind to be exact- roll over in her sleep. Her glowing green eyes stared at the white cat until she stopped moving, except for her slowly rising sides that fell and lifted with each breath.
Then, Smokekit turned her head back at her mother. She carefully set her eyes on Willowkit and let out a quick sigh of anger. I wish you were never born. And now, it will be like it was before, no new

kits in the Clan except for me!
The grey kit pounced quietly across the nursery and stopped at her mother's black paws. She placed her paws carefully above Willowkit, positioning herself to prepare for a quickie; a death blow to the neck.
But only one thing stood in front of Smokekit, refusing to let her kill the newborn. She hesitated. How could I have been so foolish? Smokekit growled at herself, letting her eyebrows droop back in a worried expression. I can't kill my own sister. That would be so... She tried to find the specific word to pronounce it properly. Unsisterly.
As soon as she realized this, she took a small step back. Luckily she did, because a heartbeat later Coalstorm's head bobbed up. "Go to sleep, Smokekit." She meowed through heavy eyes. Her head crashed back into the moss after that being said.
Smokekit shook her head and padded back to her nest.

Chapter 7

A glance outside drew her attention. Lionstripe was speaking to Hollywish. He looked at the nursery, but kept talking. His eyes were not fixed on Smokekit...at least not yet.
The kit forced herself out of the den. Her eyes drowsy from not sleeping when she should've been. She padded across the clearing, blinking a couple times to rub the sleepy look out of her eyes.
"Greetings, Lionstripe." Smokekit meowed traditionally, taking a sit beside the two.
Hollywish waited until Lionstripe looked over at her before rolling her eyes. Smokekit narrowed her eyes angrily at her. Lionstipe must have noticed because he clearly wanted to change the subject, and he did so by saying, "So, Smokekit, how are you handling the rejection of every cat in the Clan?"
A bit personal, much? Smokekit staggered back, confused by his sudden question. "What?" She shook her head as if hearing him wrong. But then her mind cleared.
"I said, how are you handling the amazing news of having a new little sister?" Lionstripe purred, to him a second time, but to Smokekit a first.
"It's a bit confusing now," she replied in a tone more hushed now that she knew what he had actually said.
Hollywish pitched in, "Echoleaf is my little sister, you know." She gave a short smile before returning Lionstripe's affectionate gaze.
How dare you try to relate to me, you foul-fetched mule! Smokekit let a small growl out of her throat before realizing what she had just said. Echoleaf was her sister? "What did you say? Echoleaf is your sister?" Smokekit's jaw dropped.
"Yes, she is." Hollywish replied sternly.
"But you two are nothing alike-!" Smokekit's words tumbled out of her mouth before being able to think. Maybe this cat had something in her defence after all. If Hollywish didn't exist, neither would Echoleaf; Therefore Smokekit needed Hollywish in order to keep Echoleaf as her friend, and dream-walker.
Lionstripe shot Smokekit a glare, but Hollywish interrupted, "It's okay Lionstipe," she meowed softly, giving Smokekit a thrill of

surprise. "You see, Echoleaf and I are sisters because-"
"Hollywish!" Lionstripe shouted as if she was going to tell a deep, forbidden secret.
"Hush Lionstripe, I'm telling a story." She shushed him before continuing, "Echoleaf is the medicine cat and I am a warrior. You see, our destinies were parted long ago, before even Lionstripe and I met. We were the best of friends, and absolutely no cat could separate us." Hollywish leaned her head in, as if only speaking to Smokekit. "Skystar told us we would be separated because it was the way of StarClan. At the time, our old medicine cat, Owlshade, was getting old and we were soon going to be in need of a new one. So, as the traditions go on, Owlshade took my sister on as an apprentice. Of course, she got all the praise and gratitude, then me; cast away in the shadows, forced to become a regular old warrior."
Boy do I know how you feel about that. Smokekit sighed at the only part she could relate to; she was cast into the shadows after a while of the new kit being there.
But Hollywish continued her story without wasting a second on Smokekit's process of the words she spoke of her past. "But I soon learned to like my life as a warrior when I met Lionstripe, and he taught me all my strengths and weaknesses as all the other cats had in the rank of warrior. And I became a very proud and loyal cat of CloudClan like I am today." She meowed, straightening her neck and holding her chin high.
Loyal warrior, my tail! Smokekit growled to herself. But despite all her bitterness she felt inside, she yawned. "I better get some shut eye, another day tomorrow; have to get through it." Smokekit shook her head before turning to the nursery.
A flash of light snapped at her and caught her attention right away. This time, Smokekit knew it could not be the sun. It was only a few moments past moonhigh. Yet the light arose, this time with no figure.
The same friendly voice that greeted Smokekit the last time greeted her again this time too, "One cat is bold, yet another will hold. The Clan will soon mourn, and so will you; be torn."
Smokekit had a worried expression. "What does that mean?!" She yowled out at the fading light as its rays started to darken and turn into sun-setting shadows. "Wait-!"
It was too late. The light had gone and Smokekit was lonesome in the dark forest. CloudClan cats disappeared, making her eyes feel

weirdly heavy. Smokekit staggered to the side, before losing her balance in mid air and crashing onto her side.

Smokekit's head shot up, her eyes wide with fear and her paws felt numb at the sudden scare. Dreaming. That's it, it was all a dream. But had she really tried to kill Willowkit?
No. It was too soon to feel hatred for the new little sister, but she still stood up. Her legs still shook, but it was not shaking enough to stop her from looking outside; Skystar had called an early-morning meeting, just like in her dream.
"I'm not going out there," Smokekit told herself, recalling the steps the dream had come in, "It will make the dream come true, then I'll have a huge prophecy problem on my paws!"
Just as she spoke the thought out loud, Whitewind padded in. "As if!" The queen croaked, "Another pair of mates, again! Soon the whole Clan will be living in the nursery!"
"I'm never going to have a mate." Smokekit snapped angrily, remembering another part of her dream with Hollywish and Lionstripe as they gazed at each other and ignored Smokekit. "Mates are for the weak!" She growled and trotted out of the den with her tail high.
"What a huffy she-kit ya got yourself there, eh?" Whitewind purred in amusement at Smokekit, although she spoke to Coalstorm who was beside her.
The queen said nothing, but simply watched as Smokekit trotted out.
Smokekit trotted out into the clearing. Her eyes determined to soon force a loud yowl from her muzzle. She was angry, very angry. Angry that Lionstripe and Hollywish could be such 'great friends' when Smokekit was around.
Of course, the dream has softened her harsh mood, but she still felt rage at the subject of the last 'walk in the woods'. Smokekit hadn't forgotten how Lionstripe ignored her, and how Hollywish hissed silently at her when they walk by.
Could it be true that she wanted to take Smokekit's place in Lionstripe's attention span? Could it be true that Hollywish wanted nothing more than to kick Smokekit out of the spotlight and soak up all the attention by herself?
Whatever it was, Smokekit needed to stop it.
Just as she thought this, Skystar prepared herself to call a meeting.

She watched Lionstripe and Hollywish emerge from their den and attending the meeting by themselves at the side of the Highrock. They nuzzled each other lovingly.
When Smokekit reached the middle of the clearing, she saw Skystar prowling out of her den and slink her white-self up the side of the Highrock.
"All cats old enough to catch their own prey gather around for a Clan meeting." Skystar meowed out loud.
Smokekit sat where she was and listened quietly. She glared at Hollywish who appeared from the inside of the warriors' den with Lionstripe at her side.
"Hello Smokekit." Lionstripe mewed as he passed her. He mustn't have noticed when Hollywish glanced back too, but shot her a devilish glare.
For the rest of the meeting, Smokekit didn't listen. Instead, she darted her eyes between Lionstripe and Hollywish throughout the whole time. They didn't seem to be listening either, so Smokekit guessed it wasn't very important.
Before it ended, Hollywish got up and gazed at Skystar with a smile. Smokekit was surprised when the leader noticed the standing she-cat and continued with her last announcements. Skystar gazed down at Lionstripe and Hollywish before speaking proudly, "Also, all cats of CloudClan should give their own personal congratulations to Lionstripe on his successful mate proposal to Hollywish." The leader purred, but then added, "Congratulations lovebirds!"
Smokekit stared at the leader in horror. Wait- What?!

Chapter 8

When the meeting was over, Smokekit looked around the clearing in search for the two new mates. Her fur was bristling like crazy and her sharp teeth gritted against each other.
Her eyes came to a halt as Smokekit watched Hollywish meet Bluesong at the other side of camp. To her surprise, their tails entwined and the she-cat pushed up against the Tom.
The kit squinted her eyes, thinking of how upset Lionstripe might be if he found out he was being...cheated on? Smokekit really hated to admit it to herself -and would really hate to admit it to Lionstripe- but Hollywish was now not only stealing Lionstripe's attention away from her, but she was also cheating on her mate and Smokekit's best friend!
The grey she-kit bent her brows and stood up. She had no idea a she-cat was standing behind her until Smokekit's face plunged into her fur.
"Aaaah!" The kit grumbled as she staggered backwards. She looked up to see Sunpool, a beautiful golden long-haired she-cat who was known to be the most loyal cat in the Clan. Her eyebrows remained steadily in their place as Smokekit straightened her neck.
"Greetings, Smokekit!" Sunpool gazed at the kit with loving green eyes, "Why are you in such a big hurry?" She asked softly and grazed her stubby tongue across Smokekit's forehead.
Smokekit watched her breath come out in steam from the cold air. She hesitated at first, but then meowed in return, "I have to speak to Lionstripe," She said clear and loud as if needing to go immediately and she was fairly impatient.
"Okay then, if you must." Sunpool gave her chest a lick and watched Smokekit race across the clearing.
By the warriors' den, Lionstripe was getting ready for a quick hunting patrol with Jaystep, Ashtail, and Pinepaw. He was giving orders, to Smokekit's surprise. Bluesong must have put him in the place of deputy while he was gone. Gone with Hollywish, Smokekit thought bitterly, but then her face lit up when Lionstripe called on her. "Hey, Smokekit, could I get you to join us?" He smiled at her.
This must be his thought of chance to change my opinion on

Hollywish and him, Smokekit assumed. "Of course," She mewed adolescently, trying to sound more like a full grown she-cat, rather than the pathetic rank she played now.
Lionstripe let a purr rumble out of his throat. He flicked his tail at the exit where they all pushed their way through before Lionstripe began once again, "Ashtail, you can take your apprentice, Pinepaw, towards our regular hunting grounds and gather as much prey as possible. Smokekit and I will take over the OwlTree. We need to get more prey into the fresh kill pile if the Clan is going to get through leafbare this season."
The white Tom nodded before his black tail disappeared behind Pinepaw's tabby hind and their mingled scent stretched the forest walls. Lionstripe led the way to the OwlTree easily, twisting and turning through the tight undergrowth until they appeared, crawling to the outside of a small tunnel.
"Kits are not allowed to hunt," Smokekit reminded him with a sigh, "It's against the warrior code." Her tail rested on a twisted log as she sat down. "So I guess you can go without me..."
Lionstripe turned to her with a blank expression, but then smiled. "That's not why I'm here, Smokekit."
Now's your chance, Smokekit thought, looking at the warrior with her big green eyes.
"I came to talk to you about Hollywish."
Yes!
"I noticed her giving you a hard time lately." He sat beside her and rubbed his nose into her neck gently. "The reason she is being like this, is because she said she really wants kits of her own. I guess she's been testing you out to see how you'd react."
Smokekit squinted her eyes, trying to process the reason. More like excuses. "I can see that being an excuse- urg, I mean reason.." - Smokekit lied and faked a slight sob. She shook her head dramatically,- "I just-..." Smokekit stopped. She could never tell Lionstripe what she thought about Hollywish. The words had planned perfectly in her head; Hollywish is a dirty, lying fleabag! She doesn't deserve you! She's a horrible no-good barrel of badger droppings!!
And now, she blew it. Lionstripe got up and padded about a fox-length away until glancing over his shoulder. "I have seen her around Bluesong..." His face weakened with sadness at the thought of the new subject.

"How could you know that?!" Smokekit yowled before hanging her head. She hadn't planned those words, and Lionstripe was probably furious; and she knew it when he spun around to face her.
The warrior's fangs parted in a snarl, but spoke no words. His eyes opened into tiny green slits. He was clearly angry, and upset, but who wouldn't be? If Smokekit's mate ever cheated on her, she'd be furious just like he is now.
"I know!" The kit closed her eyes and got up. Her paws ached from the way to the OakTree, but she carried herself quickly to Lionstripe's side. "I know. You don't have to worry, Lionstripe. I know." The words seemed to be tumbling out of her mouth unstoppably. She felt Lionstripe's tense muscles pipe down.
His gazed shifted until it met hers. "How do you know?" He meowed as soft as the wind. His fur pelted down and lay flat. "It was so unexpected..." Lionstripe meowed sadly under his breath. The breeze seemed to carry off his words and left Smokekit to wonder what he said.
"Because I've known from the start." She mewed comfortingly. Her grey pelt pushed up against his as her eyes closed tight. What are you doing?!, a voice yowled in her head, are you just going to let him in? Pretend everything will be alright now that you're buddies again? Well it won't be!

Three sunrises passed and Lionstripe and Hollywish started seeing each other less. But when they did, they purred together and shared tongues for long moments before Hollywish turned away from him and went with Bluesong. The blue-grey cat and the new black queen would disappear for hours before returning.
On the fourth moon, Smokekit entered the camp. She just returned from a quick walk with Crowfur around the borders to check the scent marks. Smokekit watched Crowfur return to his den before padding towards hers.
The camp was silent. Wind whistled through the cold air, making it even more eerie than before. It was just outside the nursery when Smokekit heard specific voices from the inside.
When she poked her head into the fern hole, her eyes gave a sudden glare when she saw Hollywish laying on a thin layer of moss. Whitewind was on the other side of her. She seemed to be building her den close to the other queens'.
"I'm so glad to be able to be with you tonight, especially on such

short notice." Hollywish purred, more in a raspy tone. Her voice rusty with...pain?
Smokekit scooted forward to get a closer view of the she-cat. "What are you doing in here, Hollywish?" She meowed, giving a worried glance at Coalstorm who let Willowkit suckle under her warm stomach.
"She's going to have kits!" Whitewind burst out with excitement.
The kit dropped her head to the side. She couldn't fully understand what the white queen had said. "Hollywish? Kits?" Smokekit cooed to herself.
Lionstripe.

Chapter 9

When Smokekit awoke at sunrise, the only thing she could think of was the rough sleep she had. She remembered a few moments after moonhigh, Smokekit was awakened by Hollywish groaning and moaning in her sleep. She was upset by the fact she had to share her den with Lionstripe's new ignorant feline friend-mate.
Smokekit lifted her head to realize it was almost sunhigh. Her eyes darted across the nursery. She couldn't help seeing Willowkit's tiny head poke out of Coalstorm's underbelly.
The pale she-kit looked like a small golden ingot by her lightly striped ginger tabby fur-and her eyes sparkled like tiny circular emeralds glinting off the strong light.
At first, Smokekit couldn't help herself but stop thinking of her problem with Hollywish. Her eyes locked on her sister curiously.
"Hiya!" Willowkit mewed sweetly. Smokekit noticed her whiskers twitching.
She was unsure what to say. But she thought of something quick before the kit felt a surge of uneasiness towards her. "Hello," she meowed in return.
Before she could think anymore of it, Willowkit swiftly hopped over Coalstorm's body and sat in front of Smokekit as if having no fears at all. Her ears perked up like the rocks on Foxclaw Hill. Her eyes gazed sharply and happily at Smokekit. Her pelt continued to glow with golden light in the peering sun.
Just before the moment became awkward, the grey she-kit meowed, "How are you..?" She asked slowly.
Smokekit shook her head and got onto her paws when Willowkit was giving her answer proudly, "Good. Thank-you, sister!"
She ignored the moon-old she-kit without hesitation. "Sorry, Willowkit, I have things to do. I can't talk to you now." Smokekit croaked, feeling a bit irritated.
"Oh," The pale she-kit sighed and then added more brightly, "Can I help?" Willowkit got out of her sitting position in front of Smokekit's nest and padded up to her sister.
Smokekit gritted her teeth and thought on it, Could she really be a useful cat? Would she really help me stop Hollywish from lying to

everycat and blinding Lionstripe to turn away from me? She looked over her shoulder at her side where Willowkit stood with a smile. "I guess so-"
"Eeeeeeee! Thank you, sister!" Willowkit mewed excitedly, jumping up and down on the spot. "What can I do for you, sister?"
Smokekit flinched. "First of all," she started, then paused. Would she really be up to the task? "You can start by calling me by my name; Smokekit." She told her before turning to the clearing.
Willowkit followed her outside where Smokekit sat down. Her pelt reflecting the light off her dark grey fur. "Okay, Willowkit. Are you ready? Are you sure you're up for this?" She asked, still a little uncertain of her sister's intelligence.
"'Course!" Willowkit mewed.
"Okay then. Follow me."
Smokekit walked quietly across the clearing with Willowkit prancing along at her side. "Willowkit!" She snapped, spinning around at her pale-pelted sister, "This is serious! If you don't want to help, go back to the nursery."
After a short moment of silence, Willowkit hung her head. "I'll help." She dared to say, lifting her emerald-green eyes up to lock onto Smokekit's.
"Fine. Look," Smokekit turned into the warriors' den. Her ears poked along the side of the large cave-den. They were very close, close enough to see the inside.
Willowkit copied Smokekit's glare. Their eyes searched the den until Smokekit continued, "That over there is Lionstripe; he's the biggest warrior with a long yellow pelt and dark stripes."
Willowkit shifted her eyes in search for the warrior. When she found him, she nodded briefly.
"He is my best friend; the cat with a new mate named Hollywish."
Smokekit moved her eyes to glance at Willowkit. She's obedient. She thought to herself.
"You mean that queen that just moved into the nursery?" Willowkit whispered, "She's a pretty feline!"
"Yeah? Well, she's also a liar!" Smokekit growled and turned her head the other way. "She's not what she tells other cats she is."
Willowkit dipped her head in understanding and gazed into her sister's eyes. "So...she isn't a queen?"
The grey she-kit shook her head and looked at her paws. "She just takes more freshkill than any other cats in CloudClan. She lied by

telling all of CloudClan she has the same signs as a cat with kits in her stomach." Smokekit sighed and looked back at Lionstripe in the warriors' den. His chest lifted and fell within every moment. Smokekit noticed Willowkit bite down on her own teeth. She bared her teeth in a short kit snarl. "What a useless furball! Who would lie about having kits?" She growled, "But wouldn't the smart thing to do would be to leave her be until the Clan realizes she won't have kits because she's been a queen so long? She's just fat." Willowkit meowed with a straight face and twisted eyes.
Purring with amusement, Smokekit thought of how her sister and her were alike. Alike in so many ways, yet so different. "I guess you're right. It won't be long until they find out the truth." She mewed with delight before turning off. Her eyes closed in a long blink when she began to sprint off with Willowkit at her side.
Then, Smokekit bashed into something in front of her. "Hey!" She growled and looked up, angrily twitching her whiskers.
Lionstripe peered down at her with worried eyes. He must have come out of the warriors' den when Smokekit and Willowkit were giggling together. "May I have a word, Smokekit?" He meowed down to her.
The grey kit growled in the bottom of her throat, then glanced at her sister who was a few paw-paces behind. "I'll meet you at the nursery later," She mewed over her shoulder, still purring quietly at her new younger sister. "We can discuss our matters afterward."
Smokekit watched Willowkit nod and prance away. She saw Coalstorm pick her up half way there and head back into the nursery, tail flicking back and forth in greeting to the cats inside as if she was just appearing to them now.
"What is it?" Smokekit asked, turning her head back to face the warrior with uncertainty in his generous- looking green eyes.
Lionstripe didn't give an answer, but flicked his tail towards the back wall of the nursery.
The grey kit glanced across the clearing at where he pointed. "You want to talk there?"
The warrior nodded and stalked cautiously towards the crawl space in between the nursery and the Highrock. Smokekit followed not too far behind, copying his every footstep.
When they got into the small space, Lionstripe gazed down at her. His tail wrapped around his paws at he sat down. "What's it like being in a litter of one, then having another newborn in your life?"

He mewed delicately, looking around as if to make sure no cat heard.
Smokekit was surprised; Since when did Lionstripe care? "Well, it was very confusing to me at first. Especially how every cat was ignoring me and all..." She began, looking into the eyes of the striped warrior in all seriousness.
"Hollywish is going to have my kits...and I'm worried I won't be a very good father." Lionstripe's eyes shrunk into slits. He was recklessly tearing himself apart. His head was clearly swirling and he was fairly alarmed of his surroundings. "I keep getting off the wrong claw with you, Smokekit, and I don't want to do that with my kits." Lionstripe struggled to keep his cool. After all, a warrior should always he cool and collected.
"First of all," Smokekit touched his chin with her nose gently and comfortingly. "Calm down. The least thing you want to do is be stressed out. You're going to put stress on Hollywish, and everything will be harder on both of you." Smokekit looked in his eyes, showing only the feeling of determination in hers.
"You'll be a great father, okay?" She mewed and pressed her pelt up against his flank. She sat down beside him and curled her tail around her paws, reflecting the warrior's position but not his slump. Lionstripe's back was bent over in a haunch. "Okay." He meowed, stiffening his neck and gazing over at the grey kit. "Thank you, Smokekit."
But then, his head slumped again. "But what will I do? If I'm not a good parent, Hollywish won't want me to be her mate. If she isn't my mate, she'll forbid me to see my kits. If I'm forbidden to see my kits, I'll never know who they are. If I don't know who they are, I won't be a good father. If I'm not a good father-"
"Shut up, furball!" Smokekit growled with a hint of playfulness in her voice. "Have you got bees in your brain? That'll still only has a half percent chance of happening when hedgehogs fly." She taunted and smiled, even though she hated lying to her best friend.
Lionstripe flickered his eyes from Smokekit to his paws. He was clearly upset and nervous. Would it be the right thing to do if she were to tell him the truth about Hollywish?
"What I am saying is you shouldn't be worried about something you have nothing to worry about."
Smokekit's tongue-tied words made Lionstripe chuckle. "Thank you, Smokekit, again. You have helped me so much."

Chapter 10

Lionstripe made his way back to his nest, but stopped on the way to speak with Darkfeather; a large, buff tabby Tom who glared over his shoulder as if stalking prey from a mile away from now and then.
Smokekit heard whistling in her ears. The wind knocked leaves off the tall birches and brought the smell of a coming storm. The sky twisted from blue, into a deep grey.
She turned away and dashed into the nursery, not daring to look around. Smokekit felt staring eyes all around her, but she padded high-headed towards Willowkit.
"Hi," she meowed, stopping in front of the sand-pale kit. Her head fell to the side questioningly. "What are you doing?" Smokekit meowed to her sister, watching her head bob up from their sleeping mother's side.
"Sleeping, but now that you're here-" Willowkit's soft, friendly voice trailed off, remembering what they had seen the day before. Her face went straight and she quietly stepped over Coalstorm. "What's the plan?" She whispered, glancing over her shoulder cautiously.
Smokekit looked the same way. Her green eyes searched the room. As she reached a look at Hollywish, the 'queen' turned her head a heartbeat too late; Smokekit narrowed her eyes, she knew Hollywish was looking at her. Would she try to listen to their conversation, too?
"We must leave now." Smokekit continued to glare at Hollywish but she flicked her tail at the exit, gesturing Willowkit to go first.
The kit smiled and stepped forward, purring as she rubbed her tail against Smokekit's cheek.
As the sisters emerged from the den, Smokekit lifted her nose to the air to smell for caution, or fear scent in the camp. She peeked her eyes at Williwkit as she did the same thing.
Their whiskers twitched as Willowkit's eyes flew open wide as she stare at the sky. Her heart pounding at once, Smokekit could feel her muscles go tense.
Then, a flock of pigeons strung across the sky. They're grey-feathered wings spread out as they flew away. A few heartbeats

later, Crowfur returned with Swiftpaw beside him. "I can't believe you did that! You can't spring at a pigeon, you jump at it!" He growled.
"Sorry, Crowfur..." Swiftpaw looked at her paws as she walked towards the apprentices' den. She was just about to take a plump mouse off the fresh kill pile when Crowfur stopped her in her tracks.
"Sorry fills no bellies! No food brought back, no food for you!" The dark warrior hissed as he disappeared into the warriors' den, complaining to Jaystep about his stubborn apprentice.
Willowkit chuckled for a moment and watched the birds fade away into the trees. Her pale pelt showed no fear and her muscle-tensity had gone. She was quite the sister to Smokekit, even though she once felt hatred for her. Now it was different.
"We better get going." The grey she-kit mewed softly as she nudged Willowkit from the nursery entrance to the place in between the nursery and Skystar's den.
The pale cat groaned in boredom and trudged forward as if walking in multiple layers of snow. "I can walk on my own, you know!" She hissed and strutted forward, quickening her pace.
"Then hurry up!" Smokekit nudged her again and looked over her shoulder, alarmed of what might happen soon.
The small cavern was shady in spite of the slit of sunlight that peered in through the entrance. It felt nice since it was hotter than usual today.
"We must discuss Lionstripe and Hollywish-" Smokekit started and barely finished when Lionstripe's head poked in.
"Hey!" He meowed.
The sisters glared at him defiantly, Willowkit was a complete reflection of Smokekit's image. Their body-builds' looked the exact same, but Willowkit was a bit smaller at the cause of her age.
Lionstripe shook his head and pulled his head out. Smokekit noticed Willowkit twitching her whiskers until Lionstripe began speaking with Bluesong. She guessed he had put him on a patrol because he went straight into the warriors den and pulled out Cinderfur and Ashtail and headed for the apprentices den.
Her green eyes watched until she noticed Willowkit doing the same. Would it be a good example to be glaring at warriors time to time? Would Willowkit get the right impression?
She turned back to her sister in time to catch her gaze. "Like I was

saying, Hollywish needs to be found out about soon or Lionstripe will be devastated." Smokekit told her sternly, "We have to at least give him a sign that she is not with-kin with his kits."
"I thought we agreed to leave it until the next couple moons?" Willowkit tipped her head to the side and wrapped her tail around her sitting body. Her tail was long enough to stretch out around her entirely.
Smokekit shook her head. "I thought it was just a suggestion."
"Sure!"
Willowkit seemed to agree with everything Smokekit said. Could it be true that they were destined to be best friends and live obediently to serve one another?
Her ears pulled back and she sighed patiently. "You are openly welcome to share your own opinions sometimes..." Smokekit rolled her eyes at her reflective sister. It got on her nerves to see that Willowkit did everything she told her to.
"I think everything you want to do, I'll be with you always." The pale she-kit purred and bent out her neck, giving Smokekit a lap at her cheek.
But she pulled back in confusion. Why is she so interested in me?
"I... Uhm..." She looked around and saw Doveheart curling up in her nest across the clearing, in the warriors' den. She turned and locked her eyes on Willowkit. "May StarClan banish all the flees from your nest." Smokekit leaned forward and returned the lick with a loving purr.

★ ★ ★

As the days went on, Smokekit and Willowkit began investigating their path ahead, identifying every scrap in their way. Willowkit obeyed Smokekit with everything she had to offer, and in return, Smokekit paid her respect to her sister.
The two grew onto eachother lovingly, and within each day, both paid more sisterly side effects throughout the days.
Sun rays appeared in dapples as Smokekit weaved her way out of the ferns and into the medicine cat's den. She forced her fur to lie flat on her back when she saw Echoleaf laying beside Hollywish. Instead of pushing herself in, she pulled herself back and watched as the two shared tongues.
"When do you think I'm due?" Hollywish tipped her head to the side

and rasped her tongue over Echoleaf's neck.
The medicine cat purred, "Another moon, Hollywish. You must be patient, soon you'll be a full mother with amazing kits."
Hollywish gazed down at her plump stomach and purred along.
Smokekit watched as her sides lifted up and dropped down with every breath. The black queen looked up with eyes that were gazing gratefully at Echoleaf for her support.
Smokekit growled in her throat but made herself move out of the shadows, into their view. Acting surprised when she saw Hollywish, Smokekit dipped her head apologetically for interrupting.
"I'll just, uhm.. go..." Hollywish pushed herself up and grunted with slight pain.
Echoleaf stood up right away and stepped to her side. "Wait here, I'll get Crowfur to help you-"
"Do you mind getting Lionstripe instead?" The queen suggested, interrupting the medicine cat's sentence. "I must speak with him."
Smokekit watched her nod and trot out, her black tail disappearing into the ferns. She was left with Hollywish. Foxdung. Smokekit cursed under her breath. "So, Hollywish," She started, sitting down and folding her tail neatly on her paws. "Have you considered on some names to call your kits?"
The she-cat looked up from her paws, not noticing Smokekit's fight-itching eyes. "No, not yet." Hollywish replied with a gentle tone, nothing like Smokekit was used to; the yowling, the smirks, the continuous spiral of emotional violence against her.
"Why were you looking at me the other day?" Smokekit started a low hiss, but when the queen looked shaken and confused, she added, "Did I have one of Willowkit's furballs in my pelt?" Smokekit chuckled even though she didn't want to. Her ears twitched aggressively and her neck fur rose.
"Are you angry with me?" She meowed, glancing behind Smokekit as the kit got up.
"Very-!"
"Hello Smokekit." Lionstripe cut in as he entered the den with a smile. He glanced up at his mate and purred, "Hello Hollywish."
Hollywish padded to his head and touched her tail on his flank.
"Walk with me back to the nursery?" She meowed and licked his ear.
"Of course."
Smokekit glared as Hollywish's tail intertwined with Lionstripe's.

Her ears pinned back and she flexed her tiny, sharp claws.
Just as she turned, Echoleaf spoke first. "What brings you here, little one? Are you hurt?" She meowed, stalking around the kit searching for any scratches or bites.
"No," Smokekit replied, forgetting all that happened just a moment before. She wondered if it was the right thing to tell Echoleaf what she had saw-but she couldn't back out now. "I have to talk to you about a dream I had." She stated sternly.
The medicine cat's loving gaze turned into a worried look. "A dream?" She echoed.
"Yes."
Echoleaf sat down, eager not to lose Smokekit's gaze. She had her head over her paws as she laid down, awaiting Smokekit's start.
"It was about Hollywish...and Lionstripe" She started, looking down at her paws. Her tail wrapped around them as she flinched in uncertainty.
Echoleaf nodded her head as she flicked her tail at the hole in the fern roof, the clouds began to cover the sun. "I see, and you were somewhat good friends with Lionstripe before, correct?"
The grey kit nodded.
Wind was scarce, and heat sunk into the den silently. Without notice, Smokekit began to sweat. Worried, she continued with her eyes glued to her paws, "But then some cat came to me and told me..." Her voice trailed away into the blazing heat that suddenly gave shock to her. "...and told me that...that..." Smokekit perked her ears up no looked behind her-she finally made up her mind, she didn't want to tell Echoleaf.
"Go on." The medicine cat encouraged. Her purr turned to eagerness into finding what Smokekit was to say.
Smokekit shook her head and looked down at her paws. "I'm sorry I wasted your time..." She got up and turned to head out the ferns.
Smokekit heard as the medicine cat got up as well and stared weakly. "Come back and tell me soon," She purred as the grey kit pushed her way out of the ferns and into the clearing. "Please." Echoleaf added.
A short wind tugged at her fur as she padded across the grass to meet Willowkit. Earlier that day, Smokekit had promised she'd be there at sunhigh. Now the sun was high and shining, but falling quickly.
"Where've you been?" Willowkit sprang up from the sheltering

place. "I have been waiting for you." Smokekit noticed her whiskers trembling, and wondered why she didn't go looking instead of waiting in the blazing heat like she did.
As the thought crossed her mind, Smokekit answered without thinking, "I was talking to Echoleaf."
"More like refusing to tell me what you wanted to say."
Smokekit's fur stood on end as she jumped and spun around at the medicine cat. "Can't I just speak to someone without being interrupted?"
Echoleaf shot a surprised glance at her, then turned the other way. Her tail whipped back and forth as if being deeply offended.
Smokekit sniffed in. When the cold scent of a storm came into her nose, she looked to the sky and ignored the medicine cat and Willowkit beside her. "Do you see that?" She mewed out loud.
"Uh huh." Her sister replied with a shiver.
Just as she replied, a different scent filled both of their noses. "But what's that?" Smokekit heard her sister whisper. She shook her head and stepped into the clearing, her eyes still glued to the sky. Frantically, she didn't know what was happening. Smokekit finally looked down and saw an unfamiliar cat in front of the high rock. On both of it's sides were Doveheart and Jaystep. Their faces pale with stern attitudes.
"What have you brought here?" Skystar trotted out of her den with Bluesong and Crowfur. They must have been planning the cats for the gathering.
Jaystep bowed his head in shame, but Doveheart came forward. "We found an intruder during border patrol." She explained with determined eyes. Jaystep agreed with a simple bow of his head. The leader didn't bother to dip her head in return. Her dissatisfied look told them she was not happy with this.
Willowkit came out behind Smokekit as they both stared at the two warriors and the new cat.
"State your excuses!" Skystar stomped her large white paw in front of the intruder's bowed head. Her eyes were slits of ice, colder than leafbare.
The brown cat shook it's head fearfully, showing no reason to be on CloudClan territories or to even be alive. "You know why..." He growled.
Skystar reacted with a fierce hiss. "Get up, Adderstrike." She muttered at him, then turned around.

To Smokekit, Jaystep, and Doveheart's surprise, the leader trotted over to her den and leapt up on the Highrock in one pounce. She trudged into the ledge and yowled, "Cats of CloudClan, look down upon this kittypet and speak your opinion."

Chapter 11

Smokekit looked over at Willowkit and saw her face twist with curiosity. The two padded forward, as Willowkit smiffed at the dusty rogue cat, then backed up in disgust. "Smells like crowfood!" She scrunched up her nose and looked away with closed eyes.
"That's because he is!" Skystar leapt down from the Highrock, landing like a large, fallen stone and making a loud pound on the grass floor. Her eyes met the rogue's as she glared at him.
Other cats approached, unsure of what to think. Their leader had recognized the dirt-smelling kittypet before any other cat. Had she known this "Adderstrike" from before?
The rogue looked up and gazed sincerely into the leader's eyes. "I seek nothing of you, Skystar." Adderstrike huffed out and flinched at the white leader's furious eyes. "Your Clan is weak, and you know it."
Willowkit leaned in towards Smokekit as her sister forced her to back up. The pale kit's tiny face buried in her neck fur. "I'm scared, Smokekit." She mewed with tightly-shut eyes. Her ears folded back to protect them from stirring in the cold wind.
"It's okay." Smokekit glanced back at the sky, noting to herself of the stages.
At first, the clouds would bunch up into long strips of black. Then they would fade into eachother and causing whirls of stormy wind. The weather had not been this icy since a few moons ago when Smokekit was born. This time it was a small amount colder.
A shock came to them all when the elder's den blew open. Screeching and yowling came from the inside as twigs and nettle clumps flew off the roof and twisted in the sky.
Not long after, Fallowshade, Fernwhisker, and Greytail raced out of their broken home. Fernwhisker -a pretty brown she-cat with brown paws and muzzle- flew into the clearing, her mouth wide with terror.
"The elders' den is gone!!" Fallowshade reported. His big, elderly shape hurling over Fernwhisker. He was clearly not fully retired from being a warrior just yet.
Greytail was not too far behind. He was cold-eyed and whiskering

his way through the broken den, looking for his moss bed. "Where's that ol' moss clump?!" He growled in distress, throwing sticks into the air, only to keep flying away.
Fernwhisker's eyes were wide with panic, and the Clan's screeching kept growing louder and louder.
Willowkit grasped herself into Smokekit's fur at once as hard twigs and rocks flew into their pelts. "Let's go back into the nursery." The older sister shouted over the wind. "It's safer there than out here in the cold!" She squinted into the wind and blindedly backed up into the den.
But Willowkit stayed put. "What if the nursery blows apart too?" She meowed over the wind, her tail curled over her paws and her eyes wide and frightened.
"We have to take a chance!" Smokekit replied instantly, taking a hold of Willowkit's scruff gently and helping her into the kit-shaft.
Coalstorm and Whitewind met them inside. They were huddled up in the corner. Coalstorm had her head over Whitewind's belly as she purred lovingly. "Soon?" She asked, purring her greeting to Smokekit and Willowkit as they dashed into the nursery clearing.
"Very." Whitewind replied, looking over her shoulder at the two kits. "We were wondering when you two would come in!" Her stomach grumbled and the queen twitched happily.
Smokekit was out of breath. Storming through tough wind was hard work! "Willowkit, are you okay?" She asked, suddenly circling her pale sister.
After Willowkit nodded her response, Smokekit sat down and sighed. "It is definitely windier than around sunhigh." She meowed and chuckled, swaying her head from side to side.
"Are you okay?" Willowkit asked, completely ignoring Smokekit's utterly awkward statement.
The grey kit's head swung to face her sister. Her vision now blurry. "W-What? I'm f-fine! Heh." She scrunched up her face to look funny and look okay, but then closed her eyes and felt her head thud on the floor.

A paw poked at Smokekit's face irritatingly. She swiped her paw over her ear and stuffed her muzzle into the ground. Her head felt swollen and darkened. All around her were cats; some she knew, and some she didn't. Even though her eyes remained closed, she could still smell their scents.

"Smokekit." A voice as soft as a dove's hum came from the distance. "Smokekit, are you there? Can you hear me?" The voice meowed, more in a delicate new. The she-cat sounded worried, saddened, and scared.
Her head spun in an odd pattern of gentle pain. "I-I can hear you." Smokekit's eyes opened in a flutter. All was warm and calm, but there were lots of cats. Everyone was silent, everyone was calm.
"Good!" The voice called, "Now keep breathing, okay?"
"Why would I not breathe?" Smokekit's head oozed with pain now. Feeling a shortage of oxygen, her head dipped and she curled herself into a ball.
The cat's paw swiped along her head and down her back. "Hush. For it will soon be over."
"For you!" hissed a low, Tom-cat sounding voice. The growl was soon followed by a loud yowl of pain, maybe...death..?
Smokekit's eyes fluttered open once again and she stretched backwards, looking over her shoulder at a dark warior. His fur was ruffled and blood stained his teeth. "W-Who are you?" She murmured, tensing her muscles. She was not ready to fight, in fact she was in the worst condition to, but she would fight for anything-anyone-any cat.
"Adderstrike is my name. Remember it, Smokekit. I am your future, and you are my life." A loud hiss of laughter came from the dark warrior and he bowled his head over Smokekit's, casting a long shadow upon her.
The warrior faded in echoing laughter. His evil, green-glowing eyes gleamed all around her, shining from the outskirts of the outlands. Another voice came into Smokekit's head as the laughter faded and the darkness came swirling in all around her, closing tightly around her neck. A light freed her as it spoke, "One cat is bold, yet another will hold! The Clan will soon mourn, and so will you; be torn!"
Smokekit's head swung up from her nest. Her wide, green eyes stretched far, as she was forced to peer into the open clearing where the moon dappled the dust floor. She was surprised to see that the rogue was not there. His blood-battered shape was all that was left as traces of him. Smokekit guessed he was either in the medicine cat's den, or Skystar's.
As she turned to look around the nursery, she saw that the elders were sleeping in pride as well. Smokekit noticed the nursery outside; the roofless den with no cats. It looked like a small version

of the 'Mothermouth' from the elders' stories.
"Smokekit?" The soft voice called again...again?
The grey kit turned around in her nest, her face painted with shock. But when the voice appeared to be coming from behind Coalstorm, Smokekit's face lit up. Maybe Willowkit can help me solve this. She thought with a sinking smile.
But what if Willowkit doesn't understand? What is she does not comprehend the amount of attention this high task deserves? No. Smokekit knew Willowkit must understand. They are sisters. Sisters who are bonding everlastingly by the heart of them both.
"It's me, Willowkit." She meowed over Coalstorm's shoulder. Her mother's chest rose and fell with every second heartbeat.
The pale kit popped her head up and purred. "What's the matter?" She sounded more serious now that Smokekit's face was worried-looking.
Smokekit didn't answer, but turned and flicked her tail at her own bed across from Coalstorm's. "I had a dream of Adderstrike..." She meowed uncertainly. Her eyes darted back and forth, scanning the ground for the warrior night-guard.
"Are you still worried?" Willowkit asked, tipping her head to the side. "I was. You passed out and kept mumbling to yourself. I thought you wouldn't stop until hedgehogs could to fly." She rolled her eyes, folding her sand-coloured tail over her paws.
Smokekit huffed deeply. Her mind fixed on her dream and what the voice and Adderstrike said. "And for the storm? What happened to it?" She asked unknowingly. But it was some information she wanted to know still.
"The storm just passed. It trashed the dirtplace with trees and destroyed the elders' den with wind." Willowkit reported. Her chin held high as if speaking with the honourable leader of StarClan.
With a sad nod, Smokekit understood now. Adderstrike was here to bring the storm. The storm represented the future. But if Smokekit was Adderstrike's future, then what good was the dumb old kittypet for? The storm was all that was needed?
The cream kit opened her mouth wide and bared her sharp kit teeth in a quiet yawn. "May I-?"
"Go to sleep, Willowkit." Smokekit answered.
Willowkit shook her head and giggled slightly. "It's like you knew what I was going to say."
"I know you better than you know yourself," Smokekit purred,

watching Willowkit lay down beside her. She placed her muzzle on Willowkit's lower neck. "And I will always be here for you."
A purr ran through the two sisters as they closed their eyes and sunk into a peaceful, solemn sleep.

As Smokekit awoke, she saw that she was not where she has lay to rest. "Willow-" She paused and looked at her sister at the entranceway.
"Skystar just called a Clan meeting!" Willowkit mewed and glanced back out the door.
Smokekit got up and lazily trudged towards her sister. As she looked outside, all the CloudClanners were already gathered around.
"Last night, I sentenced Adderstrike into permanent exile." Skystar announced, ignoring the gasps and whispers from the crowd, "If any CloudClan cat is to come across him on our territory, you have my permission to kill him on sight."
The leader waited until everyone was hushed once again to continue her statements, "This rule will last for two moons. If any further, you shalt chase him off our grounds or, with my permission, to challenge on sight."
Yowls of agreement arose from the static of cats.
"Good job!"
"Nice move!"
"Smart thinking!"
Smokekit felt a low shock grow within her chest. She bent her head downwards and gave her soft grey fur a lick to calm herself down.
Out of no where, Willowkit burst into the clearing out of her cozy place beside Smokekit. Her warm glow faded and Smokekit felt panick swell in her throat. "Get back here, you!" She hissed, somewhat playful, but somehow full of undisguised worry.
Willowkit came to a halt and turned right after Smokekit leaped after her. Within a heartbeat, the two barrelled into eachother; Willowkit's head fisting into her sister's lighter grey-furred chest as Smokekit tumbled forward into the dirt.
As she plunged into the soil, Smokekit flipped herself upright onto her paws and shook her head. "Sorry, I just a bit nervous. Adderstrike is loose in the forest and no cat knows if he'll attack or not."
Squeaking her amused mew, Willowkit focused right away. "Skystar

was very angry with him when he arrived. Maybe he is some cat who she never wanted to see in the first place..." Her words trailed off when Smokekit looked at Skystar near the Highrock.
She was speaking with Darkfeather as if he was the deputy. Her head closed in and peaking over her shoulder. Was Skystar hiding a secret? Smokekit asked herself. Her head bent to the side, peering at the cautious leader.
"I have a bad feeling." Smokekit mewed. Her nose scrunched up in a snort of disappointment.
A sigh burst out of her throat as Willowkit mewed her reply, "Me too. Skystar and Darkfeather seem to be hiding something. Since she didn't tell the Clan why she exiled Adderstrike right off the whisker, it's made me worried about what might happen afterwards...if he comes back."
Smokekit's eyes widened as she looked over her shoulder at her sister. "As if you just said that." She mumbled, her jaw wide with shock. "I just thought the same thing." Smokekit swirled her tail around her paws and sighed once again. Even if she had Willowkit on her side, it didn't explain anything.
"Smokekit!" A Tom growled from behind her. His long shadow loomed over and blocked out the sun from reaching her pelt.
The grey kit turned slowly and gazed up at the warrior above her.

Chapter 12

Lionstripe!
Smokekit's heart lurched at the name. She hadn't seen him for a three sunrises now.
Willowkit spun around too. Her long pelt sprang around as she turned to gaze up at the warrior with loving eyes.
"What is it?" Smokekit meowed with longing eyes. She missed the friendship they once had.
The pale tabby's eyes overflowed with excitement. Every inch of his massive fur was trembling. "Hollywish is going to have her kits in less than a moon!" He purred, bouncing up and down.
As he did, Smokekit felt the floor vibrate by his big paws. She suddenly turned and raced straight for the nursery. Her paws filled with power and hatred as she charged forward.
Willowkit was not far behind. With her brows bent forward, the two stormed into the nursery.
Just as they entered, Whitewind squealed out in shock. Her stomach churned and the queen's face twisted in pain."My kits! My kits they're coming!"
Coalstorm got up right away and dashed out into the clearing. She wasted no time in getting Echoleaf to come forward into the nursery to drag the queen out.
When they left, Smokekit twisted her ears back to hear them leave for sure. She noticed Willowkit's eyes focused directly on Hollywish.
"What are you planning?" Smokekit stomped her tiny paw in front of Hollywish's nose. The black queen's eyes shot open and Smokekit flexed her unsheathed claws in front of her face. "Speak!"
Willowkit's glare was not too far off from Smokekit's, but instead she sat and forced along with her sister. "She's probably too weak to speak her opinion. Maybe her 'kitting' is just her being lazy." She repeated from a moon before.
Again, Smokekit chuckled.
Hollywish raised her head but didn't move her body at all. "What are you talking about?" She meowed, giving her chest a lick. The queen turned and stared Willowkit in the eye, frightening her to the bone.

"Enough with the games!" Smokekit growled and swiped her paw at Hollywish as a warning. "Why are you in the nursery? You're not a queen! I know you don't actually love Lionstripe. You're using him!"
The queen was taken aback by the accusation. "I would never!"
"Shut your muzzle, foxface!" Smokekit snapped harshly, "I'm not done."
Hollywish's eyes opened widely but her pupils shrunk into slits.
"You have been out with Bluesong." Smokekit told her, "You have been lying to everyone about everything! You don't care about Lionstripe, you just know he's gone kittypet-love-struck over your stupid mousebrained face!" She hissed and smirked, her eyes flared green blazes as she told the queen all of her recent disasters.
"You wouldn't know!" Hollywish snapped back and heaved herself up. "You're just a kit! No cat will believe you or your lies! You're poisoning this poor kit," -she flicked her tail at Willowkit- "with all of your sickening accusations! Now get back to your mother to suckle or I'll make you!" Hollywish growled in Smokekit's face.
It seemed she thought since she was bigger, she was more powerful. All until her eyes swished from annoyed to horrified from one glance at the entrance.
Lionstripe must have followed Smokekit and Willowkit back into the nursery after they had left him in the clearing. Now he knows the truth! Smokekit sneered at Hollywish, but the queen didn't even notice.
She was glued to Lionstripe's torn silhouette and jaw-dropped in dead-eyed silence with her mate. "L-Lionstripe, I-"
"Forget it!" The Tom turned and trotted away into the clearing, running out of the exit and into the thick willow.
Hollywish fell, completely expressionless, into her nest and curled up sadly.
Hovering over the fallen queen, Smokekit laughed in which she had heard only once before...it was the same laugh Adderstrike had echoed in her dream.

One cat is bold, yet another will hold! The Clan will soon mourn, and so will you; be torn. The prophesied words loomed tall over Smokekit's mind. It was beyond her understanding.
It had been two sunrises since Smokekit had exposed Hollywish's secrets and lies, and the whole Clan had been treating her differently. But, to Smokekit's surprise, she remained in the nursery.

As the early morning sun rose into the dim-lighted sky, Smokekit lifted her head and peered out of the kits' and queens' den. She felt the morning dew slither its way into her thick fur. It was usually colder in the morning than during the day, and today proved it right again.
Green eyes grazed the room, hoping once again to find that Hollywish had been moved back to the warriors' den. But still, she lay unmoving in the back of the cold-aired den.
A small pair of ears poked out of Coalstorm's waist. Willowkit's eyes soon shown green emeralds that reflected Smokekit's.
Without a word, Willowkit scrambled over her mother and padded over to the exit. Her eyes lost Smokekit's gaze and drifted off into the sunrise.
Pink, orange, and blue strings of colour hung down from the sky as the stars of Silverpelt began to fade. With Willowkit's perked ears in the way, Smokekit couldn't get a clear view of the outside.
A huff came from her throat as she arose from her warm nest and padded over to join her sister. "I'm sorry. Yesterday was so intense, I didn't know she'd yell back at me." Smokekit's words seemed to tumble out of her mouth without thinking. Her tail wrapped around her paws in hot embarrassment.
"No cat had ever been yelled at by a queen, or warrior." Willowkit said. Her face was puzzled and she made it hard to find her main emotion.
Smokekit sighed, "I know, and I'm sorry."
"Then you should apologize to Hollywish, not me." Willowkit turned to face her, sadness and fear clouded her eyes painfully.
Smokekit was shocked by this expression... Did Willowkit not understand anything? Was she willing to give up their friendship for a worthless lying fleabag? She blinked, trying to understand. "I would never, could never and will never." Smokekit replied, trying not to flinch.
"But why?" Willowkit cocked her head to the side slightly and let a tear roll down her face. "Why are you so focused on hating everyone?"
A tear came on, and Smokekit instantly looked away. Traitor! The sinking voice yowled in her head. Leave her to the crows! But now, Smokekit flinched unexpectedly. Her green eyes turned to solid ice.
"I just...I'm not." She put her paw down sternly.
"You told me to never give up. What is this? You giving up?"

Willowkit's head fell to her paws. "You told me you'd be there for me...was that a lie, too?"
Smokekit's heart lurched. "I told you not to give up on yourself-"
"You told me not to give up on you." Willowkit's eyes saddened. "Well," She closed her eyes and turned away, tears dripping from her eyes now. "This is me giving up on you."
A thumping, broken heart and a dry throat was all Smokekit needed to tell herself everything won't be okay. Is that what the voice meant by 'One cat is bold, yet another will hold. The Clan will soon mourn, and so will you; be torn.'? But the Clan isn't mourning...at least...not yet.
The words of the prophecy rung echoing in Smokekit's ears. She shook her head back and forth in her sleep, twisting and turning her grey-furred body. With hackles raised, Smokekit's eyes split apart. She raised her head and looked around the nursery. Smokekit spotted Willowkit just as she crossed the floor and darted into the clearing.
With a twisted face, Smokekit heaved herself up and trotted after her. She followed until Willowkit was at the edge of the clearing. Was she going to go off of CloudClan territory?
Smokekit nosed her way through the thicket and under pine trees as she followed Willowkit with the wind brushing her face to her tail. The trees overhead swung around like tall blades of grass. Their thick pine needles poked out and scrapped at Smokekit's pelt as she followed her sister's scent into Tallpines.
Sunlight was gleaming brightly as it filtered through the trees, giving long strings of glow to the dirt underpaw. Smokekit trailed into the undergrowth, tracking Willowkit's scent with her nose pointing upwards.
Then, Willowkit stopped in her tracks. Smokekit was unaware of it, her eyes were glued to the view over her head.
With a thud, Smokekit's hackles raised as her sister spun around and snarled.
"Oh," Willowkit sniffled. "It's just you."
Smokekit's brows bent. "Why are you sneaking away?" She asked, giving her sister a lick on the shoulder.
"I'm not sneaking away!" Willowkit snapped.
"Then where are you going?"
The pale kit turned away. Her face painted with sorrow, and Smokekit saw her try to hide it. Willowkit's fear-scent grew

stronger. "I'm just going for a walk." She retorted abruptly.
Smokekit sighed. "Don't lie to me."
"I'm not!" Willowkit snapped back, whirling around and snarling again.
"I would know if you were lying." Smokekit stood still, forcing her fur to lay flat on her shoulders. "I followed you to see where you would go-and how far."
The pale tabby she-kit arched her back defensively. "I'm going there to be alone."
Smokekit's face screwed up as she smelled her surroundings. Had they entered Darkpelt yet? "I needed to talk to you." She meowed, sitting down.
Her sister's fear-scent lowered as she realized Smokekit was not a threat. Willowkit sat up and licked her paw, but her hackles remained steady. "Talk to me."
"I'm sorry." Smokekit bowed her head.
Willowkit's ears perked up. Her pelt went smooth again, showing her sympathy and understanding. "I am too." She whispered, "I shouldn't have gotten mad at you."
"But I was being fox-hearted." The grey kit looked at her paws. "I knew you were young, but I continued to tell you things you didn't need to know a moon ago."
"I shouldn't have yelled at you."
"I shouldn't have forced your to something you didn't want to do."
The two purred and pressed up against each other. Willowkit brushed her tail against Smokekit's neck affectionately as she swiped her tongue across Willowkit's ears.
"We better make it back to camp before the morning patrol leaves-"
"You mean us?" Growled the cats behind them.

Chapter 13

Smokekit spun around wide-eyed at the four patrol cats. "Y-yeah...you." She smiled weakly.
The broad-shouldered Tom shook and dipped his head to pick up Willowkit.
"Hey!" She hissed, batting her claws at his chest. But his fur was thick and sleek. He couldn't feel anything.
"Darkfeather, I think-" A familiar grey tabby watched as he held onto Willowkit's scruff firmly.
After a single glare, Jaystep turned back and tried at the back of Smokekit's neck.
After he tried to scoop her up, she batted her unsheathed paw at his face and scooted away. "I can walk! I'm nearly an apprentice."
"Well you're not!" A bright yellow tabby pushed her way past Jaystep. "Cinderfur, carry Smokekit back to camp. You're clearly stronger than this Tom-kit." She stared at Jaystep accusingly.
The Tom didn't fight back, but only dipped his head and sulked.
Smokekit fought for her freedom. She reared up on her haunches and sliced her sharp tiny claws at Cinderfur's muzzle as her fangs snapped at Smokekit's paws, aiming for the scruff.
"I will walk!" She growled and launched another paw-fist at the she-cat.
Losing her temper, Cinderfur knocked Smokekit's senses out of her as her paw batted her hip and she fell over.
Smokekit snarled in complete outrage as the warrior quickly grabbed her scruff and pulled her forwards.
The kit swiftly turned and sunk her claws into Cinderfur's chest. She smiled and realized it wouldn't be as hard to get her to let go; she had only one thin layer of fur. "Let me go!" Smokekit yowled and tore at the warrior's chest.
Cinderfur gasped and dropped Smokekit instantly. It seemed as though Smokekit drew blood from her chest. "I will walk." She repeated, turning and sprinting forward.

As they entered camp, Coalstorm raced forward to meet Willowkit. Icepelt darted out of the warriors' den and greeted Smokekit with a

purr and a lick on the head.
Smokekit replied with a sweet, innocent gaze into his green eyes. But then Cinderfur appeared as well. She had growled the whole way home, moaning of her 'chest pains'.
"I was worried about you."
"Maybe you should worry less!" The she-cat snapped. "She tore her claws into my chest like a mini badger!"
Icepelt smiled, but Cinderfur drove herself away.
"She's overestimating me, I could've done worse!" Smokekit chuckled.
Her father's face turned cold.
Disobedience.
The word stung in her head.
Willowkit bound over, her fur groomed completely and it was awkwardly noticeable. "Come play with me, Smokekit!"
Smokekit giggled and waited for Willowkit to leap at the leaf. Her green eyes darted back and forth as the leaf swayed in the strong wind that was slightly lowered by the tall oak trees. "Catch it already!" Smokekit chuckled again, forgetting all her fears on purpose.
Her sister's convincing words made Willowkit tumble at the leaf that lay on the early newleaf floor. "I didn't mean to do that," Willowkit started, but suddenly stopped at Smokekit's mocking laugh. "I bet you can't do any better than that!" She spat with narrow eyes at her sister, copying some irritation that she once heard.
"I bet I can! I'd make a better warrior than you, any moon!" Smokekit shot back at her sister. The two glared at each other for a couple seconds, then broke out in a laugh. "But, you are better at stalking prey than I am..." She pointed out. Smokekit's sister's frown turned around and Willowkit chuckled as well.
The breeze brushed their pelts softly as Willowkit flicked her tail with a groan of boredom. Her head turned to the nursery where their mother, Coalstorm, lay peacefully watching them from the nursery entranceway. Willowkit turned back to Smokekit, her patched pelt breezing away. "It's cold, I'm going back to the nursery to warm up. We can play later, okay?" Willowkit got up from her sitting position and started padding off to the den.
Smokekit nodded. A sigh escaped her muzzle. Willowkit turned around to look at her again. "You can show me how to hunt better,

like you, and I can show you how to stalk, like me!" Willowkit assured her. But still, Smokekit felt a little sad that their fun had to end so soon. "Can I come with you?" A spark of excitement ran through the grey kit as she stood up.
"No, you have to stay outside in the cold, alone!" Willowkit teased with sarcasm.
Smokekit mewed in amusement and followed her sister into the nursery where they'd warm up closely together.
Coalstorm met them inside, her tail flicking as she got up. She touched noses with Willowkit and nodded to Smokekit in greeting. Coalstorm and Smokekit have never been as close as her and Willowkit. Smokekit knew it was just because she felt once betrayed by her mother. She guessed Coalstorm was not as comfortable with her now.
Smokekit noticed Pinepaw walking along the nursery wall. Her scent was strong and a trace of freshly killed vole hung from her mouth. Smokekit was surprised she could smell it so intensively. It was like Pinepaw was right beside her!
The apprentice walked into the den and the scent was stronger than ever. Smokekit licked her lips and padded over to her.
"What kind of fresh kill do you have for us today?" Willowkit had come up from behind. She sat patiently, but her whiskers twitch hungrily.
Pinepaw dropped the vole on the ground and smiled, proud of herself. "Can you not smell it?" asked the brown tabby apprentice. The question made Willowkit stick her nose into the dead animal. "Is it suppose to be some kind of mouse?" She answered, looking up at Pinepaw.
"Close! This kind of mouse is called a vole." Pinepaw explained. "They are somewhat like a mouse, but voles have round muzzles. Take a look," The apprentice pointed at the head with her tail. Smokekit flicked her tail in amusement. As my sister didn't know that! I'm smart, she should've gotten her brains from me, not our father. She squinted at the floor at the thought of her old father.
"Who cares what it is?" She shook the thought out of her mind. "I'm starved." Smokekit relaxed herself and lowersed her head to take a bite. She felt Willowkit dive in beside her.
The two kits began to chow down until their mother walked up beside Willowkit. Coalstorm craned her neck to get a better view of the CloudClan leader, Skystar. The leader was hauling her way up

the Highrock.
Smokekit looked up at Skystar as well. Her yowl was loud and clear. It echoed through the trees; "All cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather here under the Highrock for a clan meeting." She announced, sitting on her hind legs and waiting patiently for all the warriors to gather around.
Willowkit had finally finished munching on her half of the vole. The two sat together and watched Coalstorm charge away after a few other warriors that were also headed for a seat at the meeting. Her ear twitched when she sat down beside a pretty dappled tortoiseshell she-cat. They started whispering at each other, making Smokekit curious about what they were saying.
Her curiosity got the best of her when she leaped over the vole, landing on her paws with a quiet thump. She heard Willowkit flinch, then start storming after her. "What are you doing?" Smokekit's sister finally caught up.
Smokekit pretended like she was surprised. "You stalk very very well, Willowkit." She complimented. Smokekit noticed when Willowkit started coming after her, she didn't hear a thing after.
"I wasn't trying to stalk you, I was-" Willowkit was cut off by a flick of Smokekit's tail.
Smokekit fell into a creeping position. The voices of Coalstorm and the dappled cat came into hearing. Her stalking had improved since last moonhigh. Willowkit had been teaching her a lot about creeping up on all sorts of animals. This one is going to be used nicely.
Willowkit had stayed behind at the nursery entrance. She sat in the light of Silverpelt, silently licking her paw. Her eyes stayed locked on Smokekit though, she didn't want her sister to get in trouble for spying on their mother.

Chapter 14

Smokekit giggled and waited for Willowkit to leap at the leaf. Her green eyes darted back and forth as the leaf swayed in the strong wind that was slightly lowered by the tall oak trees. "Catch it already!" Smokekit chuckled again, forgetting all her fears on purpose.
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"I bet I can! I'd make a better warrior than you, any moon!" Smokekit shot back at her sister. The two glared at each other for a couple seconds, then broke out in a laugh. "But, you are better at stalking prey than I am..." She pointed out. Smokekit's sister's frown turned around and Willowkit chuckled as well.
The breeze brushed their pelts softly as Willowkit flicked her tail with a groan of boredom. Her head turned to the nursery where their mother, Coalstorm, lay peacefully watching them from the nursery entranceway. Willowkit turned back to Smokekit, her patched pelt breezing away. "It's cold, I'm going back to the nursery to warm up. We can play later, okay?" Willowkit got up from her sitting position and started padding off to the den.
Smokekit nodded. A sigh escaped her muzzle. Willowkit turned around to look at her again. "You can show me how to hunt better, like you, and I can show you how to stalk, like me!" Willowkit assured her. But still, Smokekit felt a little sad that their fun had to end so soon. "Can I come with you?" A spark of excitement ran through the grey kit as she stood up.
"No, you have to stay outside in the cold alone!" Willowkit teased with sarcasm.
Smokekit mewed with amusement and followed her sister into the nursery where they'd warm up closely together.
Coalstorm met them inside, her tail flicking as she got up. She touched noses with Willowkit and nodded to Smokekit in greeting.

Coalstorm and Smokekit have never been as close as her and Willowkit. Smokekit knew it was just because she felt once betrayed by her mother. She guessed Coalstorm was not as comfortable with her now.
Smokekit noticed Pinepaw walking along the nursery wall. Her scent was strong and a trace of freshly killed vole hung from her mouth. Smokekit was surprised she could smell it so intensively. It was like Pinepaw was right beside her!
The apprentice walked into the den and the scent was stronger than ever. Smokekit licked her lips and padded over to her.
"What kind of fresh kill do you have for us today?" Willowkit had come up from behind. She sat patiently, but her whiskers twitch hungrily.
Pinepaw dropped the vole on the ground and smiled, proud of herself. "Can you not smell it?" asked the brown tabby apprentice.
The question made Willowkit stick her nose into the dead animal. "Is it suppose to be some kind of mouse?" She answered, looking up at Pinepaw.
"Close! This kind of mouse is called a vole." Pinepaw explains. "They are somewhat like a mouse, but voles have round muzzles. Take a look," The apprentice pointed at the head with her tail.
Smokekit flicks her tail in amusement. As my sister didn't know that! I'm smart, she should've gotten her brains from me, not our father. She squints at the floor at the thought of her old father.
"Who cares what it is?" She shakes the thought out of her mind. "I'm starved." Smokekit relaxes herself and lowers her head to take a bite. She feels Willowkit dive in beside her.
The two kits began to chow down until their mother walked up beside Willowkit. Coalstorm craned her neck to get a better view of the CloudClan leader, Skystar. The leader was hauling her way up the Highrock.
Smokekit looked up at Skystar as well. Her yowl was loud and clear. It echoed through the trees; "All cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather here under the Highrock for a clan meeting." She announced, sitting on her hind legs and waiting patiently for all the warriors to gather around.
Willowkit had finally finished munching on her half of the vole. The two sat together and watched Coalstorm charge away after a few other warriors that were also headed for a seat at the meeting. Her ear twitched when she sat down beside a pretty dappled

tortoiseshell she-cat. They started whispering at each other, making Smokekit curious about what they were saying.
Her curiosity got the best of her when she leaped over the vole, landing on her paws with a quiet thump. She heard Willowkit flinch then start storming after her. "What are you doing?" Smokekit's sister finally caught up.
Smokekit pretended like she was surprised. "You stalk very very well, Willowkit." She complimented. Smokekit noticed when Willowkit started coming after her, she didn't hear a thing after.
"I wasn't trying to stalk you, I was-" Willowkit was cut off by a flick of Smokekit's tail.
Smokekit fell into a creeping position. The voices of Coalstorm and the dappled cat came into hearing. Her stalking had improved since last moonhigh. Willowkit had been teaching her a lot about creeping up on all sorts of animals. This one is going to be used nicely.
Willowkit had stayed behind at the nursery entrance. She sat in the light of Silverpelt, silently licking her paw. Her eyes stayed locked on Smokekit though, she didn't want her sister to get in trouble for spying on their mother.
The low crouch that Smokekit had laid on had been nicely set up. Her underbelly was flat against the grass and her paws were spread out perfectly. Smokekit gazed up at the two warriors and one of her ears pricked up.
"Do you think it's something bad?!" The tortoiseshell sounded worried.
Coalstorm looked down, then up at Skystar. "She doesn't look very happy, so maybe... I just hope this doesn't make our kits upset." states their mother. Her eyes were full of hopefulness in StarClan bringing good news instead of bad.
"Me too, if they find out Bluesong is dead, they'll be really upset. The kits had such a good relationship with him!" The she-cat shakes her head and sighs.
"It's been a secret since the last gathering. The kits shall never know, they'll be devastated." Coalstorm breathes in deeply and let's it out in a harsh rasp. "But, on the bright side, Skystar might be calling out the new deputy!" Her eyes turn bright.
The tortoiseshell she-cat's eyes lit up as well. "I think it'll be Lionfire, he's so helpful around the clan!" She purrs.
Smokekit squints with sadness clouding in her green eyes. She turns

and trots silently away.
Willowkit looks at her sister in concern. "What happened? Is everything okay?" She runs after her sister into the den, almost galloping. At last, Smokekit stops at the back of the nursery. The two came to a halt and Smokekit turns around and looks at Willowkit.
Smokekit takes a deep breath in, then let's it out in a long sigh. "Bluesong is dead," She starts, waiting for Willowkit to register what she had just said. "and the Clan has been keeping it a secret from all the kits because we have such a good relationship with him." Smokekit starts to sob a little bit, lifting a paw and wiping a tear now and then.
Willowkit stares in horror. Her face was robbed of emotion. Her tail had fallen flat on the ground and her worried face turned into a face of disbelief and betrayal. "But Smokekit," She had started, but never came to a finish. Willowkit finally showed emotion and fell into her sisters paws. "That can't be true!" She cried into her sisters dark grey fur. "Bluesong can't be dead!" A small wind swept over the room and the two lay on the moss bed, feeling betrayed by all their clanmates.

Chapter 15

The next morning, Smokekit glanced out the entranceway. The sun was peeking at her through a slit and it painted the forest with a light morning glow. She smiles and purrs against her sisters warmth beside her. Smokekit's eyes start to close again when the dappled she-cat he had seen last night with Coalstorm woke him with a small lap on the head. Her tongue was rough and she smelt like fresh kill, not eaten, but caught.
"Wake up, Smokekit." A soft voice purred.
Smokekit opened her eyes again and looked up at the warrior.
"What is it?" She snapped furiously, remembering that she had kept a secret from all the innocent kits.
"I have been sent by Skystar to wake both you and Willowkit." The warrior purred, ignoring Smokekit's reckless tone.
Smokekit looks up at her with one eye, keeping the other one shut.
"Why you?" Smokekit tried to get this disrespectful she-cat to tell her that she is lying to the whole nursery. "Why couldn't Skystar send Bluesong?" Smokekit opens both eyes and glares ignorantly at the she-cat warrior.
"Because Bluesong has been sent on a mission recently, you know that. He will be back shortly." The she-cat smiled nervously at the kit.
With bent brows, Smokekit got up, arching her back for a second to stretch. "I know the Clan's secret." Smokekit whispered and sprung off to find Skystar, leaving the she-cat to wonder.
Willowkit met Smokekit at the mossy entrance to Skystar's den. The door was round and strung with bright pink weeping willows.
"Skystar is waiting for us inside." Willowkit mewed with a smile. Her tail folded neatly over top of her paws.
Smokekit nodded to her and continued walking until she was inside.
"Greetings." Skystar puts down the paw she was licking and flicked her tail in greeting. "I shalt speak with you today on the matter of you both reaching the age of 6 moons. It is time for you to start apprenticing." A smile spread her furry white face. "Your apprentice ceremony will take place soon enough."

Willowkit nodded. She hid her excitement well, but Smokekit uncovered it. Her eyes clouded with many emotions; Excitement, worry, anxiety, and more.
Skystar turned her eyes to Smokekit, she wasn't smiling nor showing any emotion. A heartbeat passed and her eyes looked back at Willowkit. With a flick of her tail, Willowkit got up and trotted out.
"Sunpool has brought it to my attention that you know the Clan's secret." Skystar's expression went blank. Smokekit could tell she had a lot of practice at hiding her emotions.
Smokekit nodded. "Bluesong is dead." She tried hiding her emotion as well, but it clouded endlessly in her green eyes.
It had finally reached sunhigh and Skystar sat patiently and silently. Her face was stolen of emotion. She finally spoke before Smokekit was able to explain, "I'm surprised a kit like you could be able to find out a secret like that." Skystar nods in approval that is was okay she found out. Smokekit let her muscles loose. "Coalstorm said she saw you running away after her and Sunpool had finished talking about the new deputy.
"It is true. I ran off to tell my sister. She deserves better than to be lied to by a bunch of cats she loves and cares about." Despise ran wildly through her crackling voice.
Skystar whipped her tail back and forth. "And I am truly sorry that we had to lie to you. We were trying to spare all kits of the heartache." She explains with a depressed face as the leader looked as her paws. "I know how much you care about your sister. It means a lot to me, and your mother, that she has you to protect her from any danger." Skystar bowed at the thoughtfulness of Smokekit being there for Willowkit.
Is it true that I care for her that much? I know it is, but how does Skystar know? She's onto me and I don't like it. Smokekit's thoughts pulled at her for a second, then returned to reality. "I'm glad you agree." Smokekit nodded thankfully at her leader.
"That is why I am very sad to inform you that Willowkit will be assigned to the apprenticing of the CloudClan medicine cat, Echoleaf." Skystar stood still. Her whiskers twitched as she watched Smokekit take it on. The grey kit was very upset she could not grow up apprenticing with her sister like she had during kithood.
Then, Smokekit's head bobbed up. "Why is that?" She asked politely. Her tail thumped the ground every two or three seconds as

Smokekit blinked patiently.
"I am assigning her this apprentice group because I think you two will be closer then, than now." Skystar's wise words come out slowly as her focus tightened on Smokekit who curiously stared back into her crystal blue eyes.
"What do you mean?" Smokekit sat calmly, but still wondered how this could be true. Her tail flapped against the ground again like a freshly caught fish.
Skystar looked at the kit with a well centered view. "I have observed how well you and your sister getting along, and our Clan is in very bad need of a new medicine cat since Echoleaf is getting older. She will take on Willowkit as her apprentice. I will privilege you both to be able to go together on border patrols once or twice a moon." The white leader dipped her head and gave the kit a smile.
"So," Smokekit started with a small frown. "my sister and I will not be apprenticing together?" She gazed up at the leader with sad eyes.
"I guess I can handle it if its for the safety of the Clan. The Clan comes first, right?" Smokekit puts on a fake smile, opening her eyes just a sliver, only to detect Skystar was gazing back at her with a small smirk in return.
The leader finally got up and padded over to the grey kit. "Go get ready, I'm going to call the Clan for you and Willowkit's apprentice ceremony." Skystar touched noses with Smokekit then bounded out of the den with Smokekit behind to follow.
Smokekit strolled quickly over to the nursery. To her surprise, Willowkit wasn't there. The grey kit's eyes open widely in search for her sister. "Willowkit?" Smokekit whispers, marching down the hall of a couple other sleeping kits.
Suddenly, Willowkit popped into the doorway. "Hello Smokekit! What's the matter? You look sad." Excitement flooded her voice.
Willowkit padded up to her and asked again. "Smokekit, what's the matter?" Her voice was drowned out by Skystar's yowl.
The two kits looked out the nursery entrance. "We have to go, or we'll be late for our ceremony!" Smokekit touched her sister's nose with her nuzzle then rushes out the doorway with Willowkit close behind.
"Smokekit, you have reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Smokepaw. Your mentor will be Lionstripe. I hope this loyal warrior will pass down all he knows

on to you." Skystar smiled gracefully as Smokekit hopped up onto the rock with her. The two touch noses and Lionstripe sat beside her, smiling at his new grey apprentice. Smokekit looked gratefully at him with her shiny green eyes.
Echoleaf stood up and walked to the edge of the Highrock. Her eyes glittered with happiness. "Cats of CloudClan," She started formally, "As you know, I will not be around forever. So it's time I took an apprentice. I have chosen a cat who has shown loyalty, honesty, and generosity in this Clan for 6 moons now. Your next medicine cat will be Willowkit." She gave the cats a moment to cheer. "Willowkit, do you accept the post of apprentice to Echoleaf?" Skystar smiled at the young kit and then looked at Echoleaf who's eyes sparkled like diamonds.
"I do." Willowkit mewed.
"Then at the half-moon, you must travel to the Moonpool to be accepted by StarClan before the other medicine cats." Echoleaf purred at the apprentice.
"The good wishes of all CloudClan will go with you." Skystar gazed at the new apprentices. Echoleaf sat beside Willowkit smiling, Willowkit stood up and touches noses with Skystar. Then she turns to Echoleaf and rubs her muzzle into the medicine cat's neck. Smokekit looked at the ground. Willowkit's eyes are dragged to her dreading sister in sorrow for her. She knew how much she cares. She knew how much being together during apprentice moons meant to her. Know they weren't able to be together at all while apprenticing.

Chapter 16

When the ceremony was over, Willowpaw rushed to Smokepaw's side. "You're going to be a warrior!" She mewed. Her eyes glued to Smokepaw's expression. When Smokepaw finally opened her muzzle to talk, the words got caught in her throat and she fell silent.
"I'm sorry we can't hang out like we used to be able to." Smokepaw finally stopped walking. She came to a halt in front of the nursery as if that's where she was to sleep.
Willowpaw's facial emotion shot silent. "I know, but at least we can still be together sometimes!" She flapped her tail against the ground hard so her sister would snap out of it.
Smokepaw looks up at her with gloomy eyes. "I guess. Skystar said she would let us go on patrols together when you nor I am on apprentice duty." She smiled weakly.
"That's better." Willowpaw smiled and licked Smokepaw's cheek. Her tongue was soft but scratchy. "It'll be okay, I promise. I wouldn't ever leave you. Not for any cat or any clan."
The grey apprentice smiles at Willowpaw at once, this time for real. "I'm so glad you're here as my sister," Smokepaw purred. "I would be so lost without you." Her purr spread and Willowpaw started as well. The two pushed up against eachother in loving sisterhood.

Lionstripe and Echoleaf padded over to them. Lionstripe's paws were so big you could hear the pounding of his paws on the soil. "I guess you will be having to come with me, Smokepaw." He spoke loudly and firm, but he smiled.
"And Willowpaw, you'll have to come with me." Echoleaf echoed Lionstripe's words clearly. The medicine cat waited for them to quickly share tongues and say their goodbyes for the night.
Willowpaw licked Smokepaw's cheek again. "See you at dawn." She whispered so quietly, the cats in front of them probably couldn't even hear her.
Smokepaw nodded. "Okay. Goodnight sister."
In a moment, Echoleaf and Willowpaw were padding off to the medicine cat den. Their tails faded off into the distance.
Suddenly, Lionstripe stomped his paw in front of the new

apprentice. She looked up into his emerald green eyes and shrank on the spot. The warrior seemed to be chuckling. Smokepaw's eyebrow shot up as he giggled down at her.
"What's so funny?" She snapped.
The warrior nudged her playfully and turned away, padding along the sidelines of CloudClan camp. "I was playing with you, don't you have a sense of humour?" He chuckles again.
"Of course I do!" The grey apprentice growled. Then her frown turned to an embarrassed smile. "You just, um... scared me."
Smokepaw giggled with red cheeks along with her new mentor. Lionstripe shook his head with a smile and led the way over to the apprentice den. When they arrived, Lionstripe peered inside.
"Pinepaw," croaked Smokepaw's mentor.
In a second, the apprentice that had brought Smokepaw and Willowpaw a vole when they were kits appeared out of the clean hole in the fogged ground.
When she came out, Smokepaw got a good glance at the inside of the apprentice den. It was outlined with moss as a comfortable bed. The ground looked soft with beach soil, and it was an open area inside but it was sheltered with hungover trees that drooped over. It must be there to cover them from rain. The new apprentice assumed.
"Pinepaw, I want you and Dustpaw to show Smokepaw around camp. Her mother Coalstorm didn't let her out of the nursery since the incident with MapleClan." Lionstripe kept strong during the sad silence. "Can you do that?" He broke into it.
Pinepaw nodded, flicking her tail to guide Smokepaw into the den with her. A flash of excitement flooded Smokepaw. I can't wait for this! It will be so exciting! She smiled to herself and bounced over to Pinepaw's side.
Inside, the scent was mingled with other cat scents. "Dustpaw, Lionstripe has informed me that Smokepaw needs a guide around camp. Can you come with me and make sure we don't miss anything?" Pinepaw was looking at a greyish brown cat that was laying in a place in the moss.
The cats ears pricked up, ready for a guide. "Yes, mam!" He hauled himself up and yawned to himself. His back arched as he stretched for a small moment. "Where to first?"

When the cats returned to the apprentice den, it had reached

moonhigh already. Pinepaw was already drifting off to sleep in her steps around the camp, and Dustpaw was hauling himself up every two seconds to move a fox-length of each stop. Smokepaw knew these two were tuckered out and they needed their rest.
She sat down beside Dustpaw. He was fallen asleep already. Pinepaw's was drowned out too. Their breathes were low and light. Smokepaw knew she had to get some rest too, but she couldn't stop thinking about her sister. The fading purring as the two sisters fell asleep. There was no longer someone to cuddle with. No longer anyone to say goodnight too.
Suddenly, Pinepaw's ears pricked up. Smokepaw's small sobbing must have waken her. "Sorry," She apologized quickly. "I didn't mean to wake you." Smokepaw heard her own sorrow in her own voice tone.
"What's the matter?" Pinepaw licked her paw and wiped it across her face gently.
Smokepaw sighed. "I can't sleep." A breeze blew over her dark furred head. "I'm used to sleeping beside my sister." She added.
Pinepaw smiled peacefully and flicked her tail in encouragement to come lay beside her. Although it was very thoughtful, the apprentice's kind gesture wasn't enough. Smokepaw still thought of her sister and what she is doing now.
The whole camp was quiet now. The only sound came from small crickets that hide safely in the leaves. Then, a low mutter came from across camp. Smokepaw's ears shot up. She listened carefully for the noise again.
"Smokepaw?" The low voiced sound came from near the entranceway to the apprentice den.
A familiar scent flooded the room. "Echoleaf?" The medicine cat scent was all over now. Until a shape appeared in a small silhouette in the doorway. The shadow crept across the floor in the basking moonlight. "Willowpaw?" She blinked, full of hope.
The scent of the medicine cat and Willowpaw mingled together now and spread the room. The sick smell of herbs came with it.
"Smokepaw, it's me, Willowpaw." She whispered from the doorway.
Smokepaw rose to her paws in a second and crawled silently over to her sister. "Thank StarClan you're here," She started. "I can't sleep. I'm so used to you being there, beside me." Smokepaw began to plead. "Please, stay with me tonight... Only tonight. It will be our last night together, please. It hasn't even been a full sunrise and I

already miss you." She nuzzles her sisters neck, curling her tail around her.
Willowpaw looked at her paws and sat down. "Actually, I came here for the same reason. I'm so glad you're wake. If one of the other apprentices saw me there, I probably would have gotten in trouble." mewed Willowpaw, giving her sister a friendly lick.
"I know a place we can go. You won't get in trouble there at all. They won't even find us. Pinepaw showed it to me at moonrise." Smokepaw smiled and lept up, guiding her sister to a hollow tree trunk where a fox used to live.
The place was in sight when a small call came from the nursery, "What are you doing out there?" called the old cat from the elders den.
"Follow my lead." Smokepaw crouched down like a rabbit. Her ears went flat as she hopped away into the forest bushes with her sister closely behind.
"Darn rabbits! Stay outta our territory!" croaked the cat.
Willowpaw giggled excitedly and followed Smokepaw to the tree.
"Let's settle here. We'll get up before dawn and head back to our dens before any trouble happens." Smokepaw climbs inside and helps Willowpaw inside by pulling her scruff.
"You're an awesome sister." Willowpaw whispers, crouching down and huddling beside Smokepaw.
The sisters purred and Smokepaw replied with a mew, "I would be lost without you..."

Chapter 17

The sun had not yet risen from the nights rest when Smokepaw opens her eyes sleepily. She looks at her side to find Willowpaw dozing peacefully. She smiles and purrs at the thought of being so snug beside her sister.
Smokepaw lowers her head to Willowpaw's head. She rubs her nose on her sisters ear. "Wake up, sister. It's time to go to Echoleaf's den." Smokepaw purrs loudly to wake her sister calmly without disturbing her doze.
Willowpaw lifts her head sleepily and looks over to her sister. She purrs in return and lunges herself out of the tree. Her weight pushing the tree slightly. "It's already sunup. We must hurry. Medicine cats are suppose to get up earlier to check on the cats who don't feel well. And, they are suppose to be the first ones to check on the nursery. Although the queens do that overnight I guess." Willowpaw meows excitedly for the day to start.
"Hold your tail!" Smokepaw sounded crossed. "All the cats share tongues in the morning. May we?" She bowed in front of her sister, making her feel like the leader of StarClan.
Willowpaw twitched her whiskers in amusement. "We may." She bows in return, with a small giggle.
The two apprentices start to pad back to camp when Greytail appeared in the clearing. "Watch out! Watch out! There are rabbits in the area!" The old cat yowled for all to hear.
"Oh no!" Willowpaw cried. "If I'm not in time, they'll know I was out!" She started to gallop across the clearing when Lionstripe stomped his giant paw in front of her. Surprised at how quickly he moved, Willowpaw slammed into him. Although, he did not budge. Willowpaw shrunk down into her place. But lucky for her, her sister spoke up. "We couldn't stand to be away from eachother so we met at the old oak tree last night for a last sleep together as sisters. I told her we wouldn't get caught, and she trusted me, so if anyone should get in trouble," -Smokepaw pushed Willowpaw back and stood in front of her.- "it's me..." Smokepaw lowered her head.
Lionstripe stared at the two sisters. "I was going to say," He cleared his throat and sat down. "Skystar said she wants Sunpool,

Hollywish, and me to take you on your first Dawn Patrol." He stared blankly at the two for another moment. "And if you two want to stay together at the old oak tree together at night, it's fine with me. You just have to ask Skystar and then you're free to hang out with your sister there anytime." He smiles.
Relieved, the two sisters looked at eachother. They all started laughing for a moment, then cleared. "I have to meet Echoleaf at the fern tunnel to the medicine cat den." Willowpaw smiles awkwardly then leaps away, fading into the brambles towards Echoleaf's den. "I'll meet you at the camp entrance!"
Smokepaw watched her leave. Sadness crawled up her spine as she faded into the black tunnel.
"Maybe I should go after her-"
"No need, I sent Hollywish to get her because I assumed she'd be there. I was looking you you when she bumped into me." He dipped his head when he found Skystar watching him. Lionstripe got up from his sitting place on the morning dew-laid grass. His tail was damp from sitting so long.
A flood of worry flushed her body when she realized she's never met this Hollywish cat. What if she is a mean cat? What if she is not gentle with Willowkit at all? What if-
Lionstripe interrupted her thoughts, "We're going to patrol the PondClan side of the border, since they have been suspected to not be as bad fighters as MapleClan warriors. Plus, they are very trustworthy cats." He purred in thought of the graceful warriors. "If we met them on our borders, they'd say hello instead of attack us like the other clans would." The great warrior added with a smile.
Skystar got up from her place and started coming towards them. Her face was straight, impossible to read her emotion. She didn't look angry, that's for sure. "Before you leave, may I speak with Smokepaw?" Her tail flicked sharply and Lionstripe turned away to pad off to meet the patrol team. Skystar's whiskers twitched as the warrior left them. "I noticed you did not sleep in your den last night."
Before Smokepaw could say a word, Skystar continued. "I also noticed you stood up for your sister when she did not do anything. Being honest is a skill not everyone learns." The leader dips her head. "I've told you this already, but I know you care about your sister deeply." Skystar pauses for a moment to choose out her words carefully.

Smokepaw suddenly blazed with excitement. Was Skystar going to move Willowpaw back to warrior apprenticing? That would be so cool! Smokepaw's eyes widen with mingled excitement and fear.
"I overheard you tell Lionstripe that you would like to sleep with your sister at the old oak tree." Skystar watched the apprentices eyes grow bigger, happiness flooding Smokepaw's body. "Sunpool said it would be a great idea," The leader dips her head in honor of the deputy's name.
"Sunpool?" Smokepaw drops her head to the side.
Skystar nods. "I guess the news hasn't gone around camp yet. Sunpool is the new deputy of CloudClan." Her ears shot up, trying to detect any negative response to the new deputy. She dectected none. "Anyway, Sunpool and I have agreed to let you and your sister sleep at the oak tree every night from now on, by your choice, of course."
The small grey apprentice let out a mew of happiness. She and her sister would be together after all!
"You better go," Skystar bent down to touch noses with the kit-sized apprentice. "The patrol team is waiting for you!" She watches Smokepaw get up. Her grey paws fumble together as she leaps forward. The apprentice let's out another short mew goodbye and bounces off to the camp entrance.
Willowpaw, Lionstripe and two other warriors stood in front of her when she got there. Lionstripe spoke first, "Smokepaw, this is Hollywish."
Smokepaw almost hissed at her name, but then she saw the kind look on her face. I can't believe I doubted that friendly face! Smokepaw scanned the she-cat.
Hollywish is an all black she-cat with a white patch on her left back paw. Her fur is glossy and silky and her eyes are pure dewdrop colour: blue. She was kind and funny. Her funny puns would make the day better. Hollywish was indeed a good cat. She wouldn't harm a fly.
"Smokepaw, this is Sunpool as you probably already know."
Sunpool is an all white cat with large black and orange patches. Her green eyes are like emeralds, they sparkle brightly in the sunlight. No doubt her name was truly suppose to be Sunpool.
Smokepaw scanned the deputy. "Thank you, Sunpool, for letting me and my sister stay at the old oak tree," She gives thanks to Sunpool. Her ear twitched as she comforts herself with the thought. "Until we

are comfortable with not being cuddle buddies anymore." She added briefly with a smile.
"We better get going, we're late as it is already." Hollywish dips her head and let's Sunpool take on the front of the patrol. Their tails hanging lowly behind them.
The patrol team starts dashing through the trees, tall and short. Wind gusts through their fur. Willowpaw stays running slowly behind. Smokepaw waits for her everytime she is almost in lost sight. "Come on Willowpaw. You can do this! Just remember what I taught you during our kithood!" Smokepaw encourages her sister to keep up the pace, and so she does.

All five cats stop at the border scent markers. Lionstripe turns to Smokepaw as if she had just said something brilliant. "Smokepaw, what can you smell?" The warrior lowers his jaw to taste the scents around him.
Smokepaw drops her tail and holds her head to the sky. Her nose pointing upwards. "I can smell leftover traces of multiple fresh killed voles and rabbit by-" Her senses lowered. "I can't figure out who this cat scent belongs too..." Smokepaw looks at her paws in confusion. She had worked so hard and practiced so much on scents, and now she blew it.
"Good job Smokepaw. That scent belongs to PondClan warriors. They must have been hunting in our territory." With his muzzle to the sky, his ears flattened. Sunpool and Hollywish did the same. They growled into the mist of PondClan until four warriors appeared.
"It's not what you think." The PondClan warrior came out of the middle. "This scent does belongs to us, but not because we were hunting in your territory, but because a warrior from our Clan had to be chased out. This warrior was secretly giving our kits to MapleClan. He's in your territory now. Watch your warriors and kits." The PondClan warriors faded back into the mist after the speech about the missing warrior.

Chapter 18

Smokepaw backed up to beside Willowpaw who was shaking so hard that when Smokepaw pushed against her, she could feel the vibration. "It's okay Willowpaw, no cat is going to hurt you, or they die by the paws of me." growled Smokepaw. Her hiss echoed lightly in the nearby trees.
The patrol team stilled along their borders until the end. "The forest ends here." Lionstripe dipped his head and felt proud of himself for finishing patrol duty.
"And so will your life." A voice came from behind, in the trees. In the middle of CloudClan territory and PondClan territory.
The whole patrol team spun around and shrank low, hissing harshly at the intruder. "Who are you?" Sunpool sat patiently as the rest of them growled loudly. Sunpool shot them a glance and flicked her tail to stop them from growling, but stay unsheathed.
Smokepaw stayed beside her sister. "No cat will hurt you." She repeats from before. Her tail hung low behind her. Her chest was touching the floor and she bared her fangs evily.
"I am a rogue." The Tom-cat smirked, baring his fangs back at the new apprentice. "I smell kits." His nose points to the air before turning to look at Willowpaw, the smallest one of them all. "Ah, your Clan mates can't do anything until I attack. It's against your precious Warrior Code." The Tom's eyes shrink into small slits as he licks his lips.
Smokepaw hissed again. "Stay away from her or I'll make you crowfood!" She yowls furiously and pushes up against her sister in protection.
The rogue tabby growled in return, but he had a tone of laughter. "Get out of my way, apprentice. This kit is my fresh kill today." He laughs roughly.
"Stay out of our territory," Hollywish distracts him and pitches in. "Adderstrike." She adds, desperately trying to get his eyes off the new apprentices.
The Tom growled again. "How do you know my name, Hollywish?" The black cat sits calmly exactly like Sunpool, the deputy. "Because I smelt your scent long before you came along." Now her fur bristles

angrily. Her face was bent and teeth were bared sharply.
Surprisingly, the Tom didn't take his eyes off the small apprentices. He licked his lips again and snapped his jaws to warn Smokepaw of how dangerous he is. To his surprise, she didn't move a bit. Her growl got more intense with every step towards them.
"I don't care about the Warrior Code, I will not let you hurt my sister!" Smokepaw snaps at him. Her fur was standing up so much she looked like a warrior.
He narrowed his eyes on the apprentice and picked up his paw. Swiftly, he swatted her with unsheathed claws. He's whiskers twitched in amusement as she fell into a nearby ditch.
Sunpool bounced up to her paws and yowled, meaning the fight has begun. "Let go of that apprentice!" She yowls, running at him before anything else.
Without giving her a chance to pounce, his claws pressed against the medicine cat apprentice's throat. "Don't touch me, and she doesn't die." He whispers, almost soundless.
Sunpool stopped in her tracks. But her worry for the apprentice beneath his claws was not as bad as Smokepaw's worry for her sister.
The grey apprentice suddenly leaps out of the gorge and she starts charging at the big Tom. Her eyes were slits and she was raging at him. "Let go of her, you beast!" Smokepaw meows harshly as she jumps. Not giving him time to fight back, the apprentice lands on the rogues back, raking her sharp claws down his spine. Her jaws snap together on his ankle and she shakes furiously.
Now, the rogue was mad. His claws came off the small ginger apprentice and clawed at Smokepaw. A scar ran across her eye horizontally.
It bled for a small moment and the rogue licks his ankle with both eyes glued to the small grey cat. Both their eyes slits watched every moved the other made.
Smokepaw growled again, "Do not hurt her, or that ankle bite will get worse. It'll be you who is that pain." She threatens him with unsheathed claws.
"Hurt who?" Adderstrike moved towards Willowpaw, mocking Smokepaw's fury. "This little kit?" He sniffed Willowpaw again. The strong scent of herbs went into his nostrils. "Ew! You smell like mouse droppings!" Adderstrike growled and turned away. His tail flicks angrily. "Oh well, I'll kill you for fun." Her claws return to her

throat and Smokepaw gave a harsh hiss before crouching again. Willowkit mewed in horror. Her last breath squeaked out of her as the rogue slit his claw through her throat.
Adderstrike laughed evily and leapt over them, back into PondClan territory. His blood stained claws make dents in the sandy floor and splash puddles on grass petals.
Smokepaw squealed madly and rushes over to her sisters side. "Why didn't you do anything?!" She hissed at the warriors with tears in her eyes. "You stupid cats don't do anything around here!"
Smokepaw mewed sadly. Tears rolling down her cheeks repeatedly and uncontrollably.
Hollywish, Lionstripe and Sunpool sit with their heads down. They bow in sorrow as dark clouds roll over the sky. Loud crashes of thunder rumble over their heads.
The apprentice cries out dreadfully with her nose stuck into her dead sister's neck. Her sobbing wails echo through the wet forest as multiple splashes of rain drops down on her and the forest.
Smokepaw's body went limp as she lays beside Willowpaw. She breathes in heavy heaves of sorrow.
Lionstripe's brows fall back. "I'm so sorry, Smokepaw." He shakes his head. "This shouldn't have happened." The great warrior shakes his head and lets out a mournful yowl into the sky.
The cats from the patrol could hear other CloudClan cats meowing out loud from behind, further into their territory. Skystar finally appeared from the trees. Pine needles brushed her white fur as she came out. She sat down next to Smokepaw and Willowpaw. Her neck bent to Smokepaw's level. Skystar's nose rubbed the back of the grey apprentice's ear.
Smokepaw looks up at the leader with tears in her eyes. "Why has StarClan let this happen? Why me?" She sniffles. Her green eyes go wide with sadness.
Instead of replying, the leader touched the apprentices nose respectfully. For she did not know why this happened.
"StarClan is different sometimes. During your moons, StarClan will give and take." Skystar took a deep breathe in, choosing her words carefully. "You must learn this through focus training." She whispers into the grey cat's ear.
Smokepaw looked at her leader in disgrace. "I promised no cat would hurt her, she's dead, and it's all my fault!"

Chapter 19

The grey she-cat stepped up and galloped off with her head down. Her scent was well comoflauged in the cold rain. Smokepaw had left tiny paw prints in the mud puttles behind her. The apprentice's tail dragged as well as she started to slow down to catch her breath. She looked up, not knowing where she had gone.
Her ears pointed up and her nose sniffed the air, taking a whiff of the stale scent of the night patrol team that left to guard the borders last night.
Smokepaw refused to let the scent get to her. Her Clan and herself had failed to protect her sister. The sorrow stabbed her in the chest like a hawk talon. She blinked a few times and kept trotting. "If my sister is with StarClan, I'll meet her there." Smokepaw meowed to herself quietly as she reached the border.
MapleClan's patrol party had just gone past when she appeared out of the bushes. Their scent flew into her open jaws and she snapped them together. Her eyes narrowed at the warriors that passed. Adderstrike is a PondClan rogue. MapleClan hates PondClan as much as I hate Adderstrike. I must tell them what has happened and get them to help me fight back! Smokepaw smiled harshly at her plan.
She kept her pace to a slight speed as she raced through the bushes, snapping every twig she could find on the ground, trying to get the patrols attention. A rock stood in front of her. It was round and boulder-like. Smokepaw scanned it quickly, finding a way to push it over in front of the patrol team of MapleClan cats.
Smokepaw gulped as she smacked against the side of the huge rock. Her head pounded. She could hear blood pulsing in her ears. It rang loudly as the boulder flew in front of the MapleClan warriors. The crash was just in time, not hurting any cats at all.
The apprentice poked her head out of the side of the rock. She glances at the warriors who unsheathed their claws and hissed with bared teeth. Her ears went flat as she dropped to the floor, showing mercy to the MapleClan cats.
"Apprentice," A big white warrior with black paws stepped forward. His paw stomped in front of her face like Lionstripe would do.

"State your business." The Tom growled in warning.
Smokepaw looked blankly up at the warrior, copying Skystar's way of showing no fear correctly. Her fear scent mixed with anger. "Uh," she mumbled. "Pushing rocks, can't you see?" answered Smokepaw. Her bristled fur went down and she stood tall, waiting for his response.
The cat glared at her. "This is the borderline. If you come any closer, you will be killed on the spot." His threaten rang in the apprentice's grey ears
With a small pout, the grey she-cat replied with stern eyes. "I have a deal for MapleClan." She stared back at the warrior with beaming eyes. "Now if you'd politely escort me through MapleClan territory, I'd be glad to share." The grey apprentice held her breath with a smirk.
Another cat stepped up from behind the white warrior. "This CloudClan apprentice might come in handy," the she-cat points out. Her friendly smile hid an unbearable evilness inside.
The three patrol cats scanned the small grey apprentice as she sat gracefully, squinting back at them.

All the warriors stood guard by Smokepaw's sides. The white warrior with black paws stood behind him. The lovely ginger she-cat stood by his left, and the other soundless silver tabby she-cat stood firmly at her right. The warriors guided Smokepaw through the trees and into the large clearing.
When they got into the middle of the clearing, the sun shown brightly on her grey pelt. Other cats stared in horror at the CloudClan apprentice. Small whispers started to echo across the clan's dens.
Smokepaw's scent was strong of CloudClan. She held it not-so proudly.
A ginger she-cat stepped out of the leaders den. Her fur bristled instantly as the scent of CloudClan spread the area. Her smiled flipped when she saw the apprentice. "Why have you brought me this CloudClan apprentice?" snarled the leader at her fine warriors. "Much better escorters than CloudClan cats, you can give them that." The small grey apprentice say in front of the tall ginger leader. Her neck bent to lick the strong scent from her pelt.
The leader scanned Smokepaw with a keen eye. "What do you want?" asked the she-cat. Her orange pelt was flawless in the slight

breeze that pushed its way into her thick fur.
Smokepaw stopped licking her back and looked at the leader. Her whiskers twitched in amusement. "I have a deal." She waited. The cats looked around, whispering about how they don't trust CloudClan at all. "Not from my clan, from me." Her continuing voice hushed the small crowd.
"I demand you speak to me alone in my den." The ginger got up and stopped glaring. Clan mates gathered around, mocking and talking about every one of Smokepaw's moves. The apprentice nods politely and follows the leader to a big rock. Inside, there was a hole that went deep down. A moss bed was inside. "What is your name, apprentice?" The ginger she-cat mews, now her eyes were tender.
Smokepaw kept her strength. "My name is Smokepaw, and yours?" She narrowed her eyes and tensed her muscles a little bit.
"I am Onestar, Leader of MapleClan." said Onestar. Her pride was shown clearly in her voice. She watched the apprentice closely, scanning her scent and emotion.
Smokepaw dipped her head respectfully and flicked her tail at Onestar with narrow eyes. "Good evening, Onestar. As I was saying before, I have a proposal for CloudClan..."
Onestar's ear twitched with interest. "Go on."
The grey apprentice nodded and went on, "As you probably don't know, my sister just died. This was caused by a PondClan cat that has decided to become a rogue." she explains at once. She blinks once and continues to stare at the ginger leader. "I know that MapleClan is full of hatred against CloudClan and PondClan. Therefore, I have a deal," Smokepaw scans Onestar for negative susp- icions, but suspects none. She holds her breath, waiting to see if she really should go against her home clan.
Onestar thumped her tail against the ground in frustration with the grey cat's long pause. "Speak up!" She spat angrily.
Smokepaw jumped to her paws. She gave a small hiss. "Remember, I am in your territory, I could launch an attack at any moment." threatened Smokepaw with her claws sharply unsheathed. "I have come up with an idea that can get you whatever you want from both PondClan and CloudClan. I can easily go into any Clan and find out whatever you, or I, want."
The leader squinted anxiously. "What are you saying?"
"Your hate for CloudClan can get me revenge for my sister's death." Smokepaw lays out. "Onestar, do you accept my proposal?"

Onestar quickly grabs this moment to think. "I must speak to my deputy, Halfwind, about it." She gets up and turns away. Her tail flicks to tell her to get out. "I will accept you into the clan for now, as long as none of the other clans know. It will be a secret for MapleClan to share only." Onestar flicked her tail again.
The CloudClanborn she-cat marched out of the leaders den and skidded to a halt in front of the high rock. The scent of apprentice lay here from last nights meeting. Smokepaw lifts her head high as she waits for the leader to start.
A cat sniffed it's way out. It was a kit. The Tom-kit smelled his way out of the nursery. His wet nose dug it's way through the clearing and closer to Smokepaw. With a disgusted look, the grey apprentice moved over to let him pass. Then, the black and white Tom turned back for her. "Get away from me you rat!"
One of the queens ran out looking for the kit. She saw Smokepaw hissing angrily at it. She scrambled over quickly and bared her teeth. Her paws stood over all four corners of the Tom-kit. She growled at Smokepaw and grabbed the kit, marching back into the quiet kit den.
Soon, Onestar came out of her den. She pounced onto the Highrock and yowled instantly, "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather here beneath the Highrock for a Clan meeting." The Leader sat awaiting her Clan to form a circle beneath her.
MapleClan cats lined up in their usual order. Smokepaw felt other apprentices appear behind her. A few sat beside her, sniffing anxiously. But, Smokepaw just growled and they backed off.
Onestar finally started. "Cats of MapleClan, I know it is not usual for us to let in a cat from another clan. As you may have scented, this apprentice has come from CloudClan. She brings good news; CloudClan and PondClan both will be tricked into giving us what we want." yowled the leader. Cheering and pounding paws made the forest echo. When the noise stopped, Onestar continued, glad to inform her clan was now safe from danger. "Smokepaw," The Clan silenced. They had never heard the name until the grey apprentice stood up, her eyes were fixed on the leader. "Please stand beside me on the Highrock. We are thankful for your gratitude towards us."
Onestar nods at the apprentice. Her ear twitched instinctively. Smokepaw marched her way through the crowd and trotted over to the side of the big rock. Her paws were steady as she leapt up beside MapleClan's leader. "Yes, Onestar." The apprentice dips her

head respectfully. She sits down and stares down into the clan.
They trust too easily. Smokepaw giggles through thought.
"Our Clan must trust this apprentice to handle our problem of the two despised clans whom we shall not speak of." spoke Onestar. Her mostly black pelt was glinting with sunlight.
"Why should we trust her?" scowled a voice from the crowd.
Onestar seemed to know the cat well when she gave him a scornful look. "This cat managed to get into our camp by getting the attention of my finest warriors. They were on patrol of the CloudClan border. Foxlight spoke of a boulder being pushed in front of her by this apprentice!" The sound of her voice sounded agitated and fake. Although her face told a different story. "She managed to come into the camp without a single warrior to challenge her to a fight... Speaking of, any takers?" Onestar glanced at the apprentice. But Smokepaw's expression was completely blank.
A pale tabby warrior stood up. He growled viciously.
"May I?" Smokepaw hissed at the leader, demanding to aggravate the warrior.
Onestar nodded.
Smokepaw looked down at the tabby. "Are you sure?" She gazed at the big Tom-cat. "Looks like you'd give up on the first try at me!" Smokepaw growled with a smirk. Her tail whipped back and forth, waiting for him to fight back.
The Tom's lips peeled back into a snarl. His tail flicked impatiently at the grey she-cat. "You wanna bet?" hissed the pale warrior cat.
Onestar bent down to her level. "He's name is Tigerfrost." She explained. "You might not want to-"
"Explains his rebelliousness." Smokepaw meowed. Her whiskers twitched in amusement. She recalled to the last time a cat snarled at her. A smirk spread her face. "Actually, one of your queens almost challenged me." Smokepaw told Onestar.
In an instant, Tigerfrost lept onto the Highrock. His claws unsheathed. He pounced onto the grey apprentice, knocking them both off the Highrock into the ground.

Chapter 20

Smokepaw was awoken by a light touch of Sandpaw's nose. "Wake up." She whispered to the grey sleeping apprentice. Her nudging paw gave a forceful push and Smokepaw fell out of the warm moss bed.
"Hey!" Smokepaw growled. Her paws fell flat on the ground as she caught herself. She looked sleepily at the warrior who stood next to Sandpaw. It was Halfwind, her mentor and deputy. Smokepaw blinked again. She shook her head. "You know, I have never had a mentor before. Except for Lionstripe, but he never taught me anything." Smokepaw sighed.
Halfwind shook her head. "You're not going to run away from me too, are you?" She pretended to make a joke out of it to spoil the awkward moment.
Smokepaw's fell silent. She gave a small chuckle, then padded up the fern tunnel. The brambles scratched at her thick fur on her way up. "You coming?" She called, almost reaching the top.
Hopping over a root, Sandpaw quickly follows behind. "Of course, you don't think you're going to train alone, do you?" She says, trotting up the tunnel.
Halfwind also follows behind. She watches the two hop out of the hole and landing on the ground. "Nice leap, Smokepaw." She purrs, marching onwards. "We're going to Snakerocks today, and Firepaw is going with Blackfoot." Halfwind reports, galloping slowly down the Mapleway.
Smokepaw sniffs in, smelling the borderlines to CloudClan. She shakes her head and trots through the brambles. They cut against her fur, reminding her of the apprentice tunnel. "Almost there?" Smokepaw looks up at the sunny escape.
Halfwind slows her pace. "Almost." She replies.
"Where are Snowstream, Firepaw, and Blackfoot?" asked Sandpaw with steaming eyes. She was clearly feeling impatient. "I've seen them being late, but we're almost there!" She complains, rolling her eyes and looking back at the Mapleway trail from the camp clearing.
Smokepaw looks back as well. Her green eyes beaming back as she

flicked her tail, convincing Sandpaw to come ahead. "They'll probably come sooner or later." She looks at the deputy. "Blackfoot told me him, Foxlight, and Silverclaw were taking Firepaw, Snakepaw, and Owlpaw down to the OwlTree to look for mice. But that defiantly doesn't explain why Snowstream is late." explains Halfwind. She looks back as well, curiosity twitched in her whiskers.
The white patched deputy led them out of the brambles into Snackrocks. It was sunny and hot. Multiple voles scrambled in the cracks and adders swam quietly in the rocks. Sandpaw padded silently out. Followed by Smokepaw, who was prancing along. She had never been here before. Excitement ran through the grey apprentice.
Halfwind sat down, she glanced down the Mapleway and stared amusingly. "Well, Snowstream, I'm glad you decided to show up." mocked the deputy.
A white she-cat came bursting through the ferns. Her sides were heaving with gasps of air. "I was... coming back from..." The cat catches her breath in between heaves. "Dawn Patrol... when I saw you... leaving." Snowstream finishes, blowing out a heap of air.
Sandpaw and Smokepaw smirked in pleasure at Snowstream while she gets put down by Halfwind. "She always does this," says Sandpaw as she leans over to Smokepaw. "Always late for apprentice training, hehe." She giggles with delight.
Smokepaw smiled and laughed at the entertainment show put out for them. Halfwind was standing over the white she-cat, accusing her of not being able to take on an apprentice. "I am able to, but if you leave without me, I can't really be on time!" Snowstream stuck up for herself.
The deputy sighed long and hard. "Very well, Snowstream." She turned and flicked her tail. Sitting in front of Smokepaw, Halfwind started, "We are going to learn fighting skills today." She says, "I know you're very strong already, so I want you to keep your claws sheathed." explains Halfwind. Suddenly, the white patched cat leaps into the air, over Smokepaw and lands on a rock. She landed silently as she looks at her apprentice. Her tail flicks, making Smokepaw want to jump at her.
The apprentice glares, not moving at all. She knew she was going to have to fight Halfwind no matter what. This was just practice. Smokepaw starts running for the deputy. Claws unsheathed quietly,

her head down to block the view. Then, she screeched to a halt as Halfwind leapt for safety. "You really thought I would ram into you?" Smokepaw shakes her head.
But Halfwind didn't give up. She landed on her paws and swiftly ran to face Smokepaw's tail. Halfwind charges silently and Smokepaw leapt up a tail length in the air. The apprentice landed on Halftail's back and raked her claws in half way, to give Halfwind a scar to remember.
The white patched she-cat growled harshly at the apprentice's disobedience. Her eyes shunk into slits and she raced towards Smokepaw, claws now unsheathed.
Smokepaw saw the flare of anger in her eyes. She smirked to herself and charged back at her. When they met, Smokepaw's ducked down, sliding underneath the great warrior.
Halfwind came to a stop. She turned to face her apprentice. "I'm surprised you're so good. Tell me, when did you begin apprenticing?" asked the patched she-cat. She ran and flipped Smokepaw over. The two both landed on their paws.
"About three sunrises ago." replies Smokepaw. She sheathed her claws when she saw her mentor wasn't angry. The grey apprentice shook her glossy fur. Sunlight beamed down on it silently and breathtakingly. The warmth soothed her. Smokepaw sat and looked at her mentor with her emerald eyes.
The patched cat stopped. "Really?" She spun around to face her apprentice. Her head turned to Snowstream and Sandpaw. Smokepaw copied her. The two pale cats tumbled over each other. Claws sheathed, but teeth bared. Sandpaw was almost the same size as Snowstream. Her bright fur reflected the sunlight and it shook as the her mentor scrambled to her feet. Snowstream rolled over, trying to get her apprentice off. But the pale tabby hung on tight. Growls and hisses came from the furry ball Smokepaw giggled at them. She shook her head with a smile. Memories of her and Willowpaw came back into her mind. Strength was the only word that is brought to her mind when she thought of her sister. But when she remembers when she couldn't protect her sister properly, doubt clouds her eyes and she groans out loud. The image of the slit in Willowpaw's throat echoed in her thoughts.
Suddenly, Halfwind wraps her tail around the grey apprentice. "What's the matter, Smokepaw?" her golden eyes filled with worry. When Smokepaw didn't reply, Halfwind licked her head

comfortingly.
Wind gusted in the sunny air. Snowstream realized the two had been watching. Her focus turned to them and Sandpaw tackled her, pinning her mentor to the ground. "Play dead for me, Snowstream!" growled Sandpaw playfully.
Snowstream went limp. Her body completely rested against the hot rock floor. When Sandpaw adjusted her grip, her mentor pushed up and the pale tabby went flying.
Sandpaw flipped in the air. Her back twisted and she fell to the ground, surprisingly landing on her paws. She takes a deep breath in, letting out with a glare at her mentor. Sandpaw ran back at her and used Smokepaw's trick by sliding underneath Snowstream. Her claws pulled the sandy ground on the way under. Sandpaw's back pushed up quickly and she ran out from under where she wanted Snowstream to land. She galloped over to Smokepaw and high-pawed her.
Smokepaw watched Snowstream land on her stomach. She let out a small yowl as she hit the solid ground. Smokepaw noticed Sandpaw's whiskers twitch in amusement. She copied her with a purr of enjoyment.
Snowstream growled at the two. "You're pretty strong for a couple of new apprentices." She sneered.
"You might even get your names early if you keep up this work!" added Halfwind as she stomped her paws repeatedly in applause. Sandpaw and Smokepaw both purred happily.

When they arrived through the entrance, brambles greeted Smokepaw by scratching her pelt roughly.
Onestar rushed over to them. "Smokepaw, warriors have been coming into our territory from CloudClan, looking for you and the black queen." She explained as Smokepaw galloped to her side. They turned to her den. "I'm sorry, but you must go back with them." She pointed her paw to two cats who stood by her den walls. They must have scented her, because their focus was now on the apprentice.
Lionstripe and Sunpool! Smokepaw let out a nervous growl when she noticed the two easily. Their scent covered the camp now. No cats dared to pass through them. Queens, kits, and elders hid in their dens, frightened of the powerful scent they had. Smokepaw padded angrily over to them.

She sat in front of Lionstripe and he hissed at her right away, "Where in StarClan have you been?!" He growled and got up.
But Onestar stepped in front of Smokepaw. Her front leg blocked him from shredding her to pieces. "Remember, this is not your territory. Do not cause any problems or blood will be shed." She threatened him with beaming eyes. Her long dark pelt hung by Smokepaw's face.
The apprentice pushed her leader off at once. "I'm not a kit, I can protect myself. I beat Tigerfrost," -a dark tabby gave her a dirty look but she ignored him.- "I'm sure Lionstripe will be no problem at all." hissed Smokepaw. She arched her back enough to tell him to back off.
But Lionstripe huffed back and sunk his teeth into her scruff in a second.
Smokepaw didn't take this as a friendly -nor helpful- move. She growled furiously and unsheathed her claws. As she gabbed them into his chest, her neck lifts and her razor sharp teeth sink into his throat.
The warrior choked and leg go, but Smokepaw didn't. When he's teeth set her scruff free, her body pulled down harder on his pale-furred neck. Smokepaw growls muffledly through clumps of fur and shakes hard. Lionstripe swings his head back and forth, but it was no use. Smokepaw didn't let go. Her teeth sunk deep into his neck and he dropped to the sandy floor. The warrior's sides gasped for air when the grey she-cat let go of her tight grip.
She breathed in and blew it out quickly. Her beating eyes glared angrily. "Do not cause problems or blood will be shed." Smokepaw repeats her leaders words exactly. Psychoses clouded her eyes and she felt rage against her old mentor and friend. "You're blood will be shed, Lionstripe." She scoffed, suddenly inhaling deep, heavy breaths of air.
Lionstripe coughed again. He gulped with mixed fear and anger.
To Smokepaw's surprise, Sunpool stepped in. Her glossy tortoiseshell fur glinted in the sunlight as she stomped her foot down between the two. "You," she glared at Smokepaw with beaming green eyes. "I will discuss this incident with Skystar. For now, you will be known as a MapleClan apprentice, since that is what you have proven to be."
Smokepaw noticed Onestar's frustration. Her claws were unnoticeably unsheathed and her golden eyes seemed angry too.

Smokepaw guessed she was mad that the deputy, of another clan, was making the choices in her clan territory.
CloudClan's scent scattered the territory when a drop of Lionstripe's blood dripped onto the dust floor. He breathed deeply and heavily. The three cats turned their hard to glance at him. Sunpool's eyes were worried. Onestar's eyes showed satisfaction in the strong grip Smokepaw used to hold. Smokepaw's eyes were shining brightly at the sight of revenge.
The grey she-cat padded over to him. A smirk was well covered on her dark furred face. She bent down and pressed her nose against his ear. "Don't bite off more than you can chew, Lionstripe." whispered Smokepaw. "You got lucky. Next time, you'll be more than blood dripping." She turned and padded off, back to Onestar's side. Their pelts pressed together and Smokepaw purred in mocking amusement.
Sunpool growled. The apprentice glanced up at her. Would she hurt me? Smokepaw thought to herself. She tilted her head, confused for a moment.
"You're crowfood!" The CloudClan deputy yowled and ran around. Her powerful white paw stamped down on Smokepaw's tail. Smokepaw squealed at the pain that shot up her spine. She instantly fell on her side and rolled around. As she kept her legs together, her two hind legs pushed upwards. Her hind claws tore at Sunpool's underbelly and as she let go, the deputy went flying across the clearing. Smokepaw leapt up, only to see Sunpool crash into the sand.
Meows and cheers came from cats that gathered around the sides of the clearing. Sandpaw purred along with them. She gazed at Smokepaw with a satisfied look.
The grey apprentice got up and lifted her tail high. She absolutely adored the exciting meows of the crowding cats. Smokepaw bowed proudly. Now this was definently a Clan who appreciated their cats, and it was so worth being praised by!

Chapter 21

Gold rays glowed in Smokepaw's eyes as she adored the encoring praise in a dream. Her leg shot out back- wards and hit Sandpaw who was sleeping soundlessly beside her.
The cream tabby bobbed her head up in surprize and looked over her shoulder at the grey cat beside her. "Hi Smokepaw." Sandpaw brushed her forepaw over her grey furred neck. "Wake up. You're dreaming your own self-praise!"
Startled, Smokepaw raised her head and glared at the other apprentice. "I know! It was amazing until you woke me up!" She scowled, den dived back into the moss and cuffed her paw over her ears.
"Sorry." Sandpaw barely whispered. Smokepaw felt her turn and heave herself up "We'd better start getting the elders some moss. It rained all night."
The pattering of drops echoed in the underground apprentices' den. Smokepaw lifted her head and stiffen- ed when she realized her nest was soaked as well.
"Well come on then," Smokepaw lifted herself to her paws. The roof hit her head on the way up. "We have to dig out some more roof if we are to continue living in here." She shook her head by her paws and shuffled her way outside. There, she yawned and stretched out her ragged pelt.
The morning air was calm and smelled like fresh kill, making Smokepaw's mouth water. She stepped forward with Sandpaw at her side. The cream she-cat was used to the shallow den, and she slunk out like an adder.
"I know the best places to find dry moss." Sandpaw purred. She led the way across the camp and disappeared into the warriors' den. With her, Snowstream padded out and sat in the clearing in front of Smokepaw. "You two have been very good apprentices the past few sunrises. When I say I, I mean all the Clan including me trusts you two to the fullest."
Sandpaw must have begged Snowstream to let her out. It must be her first time out of camp as an apprentice, because her eyes gleamed with the mornings glow.

"Therefore, you may leave the camp on your own." Snowstream purred with a tipped head. She found amusement in their happiness-overflowed eyes.
"I call taking the lead!" Sandpaw snorted and pushed past Smokepaw to the exit.
With a challenging sneer, Smokepaw raced after her and charged into the outer area and collapsed in wet marsh. Her paws pricked with fear as the droplets of soggy soil sunk in between her hackles. But she trudged on. Smokepaw tried running after Sandpaw, but the feline was too quick.
The cream apprentice darted back and forth, weaving through the trees of the moorlands out towards Darkpelt, not back where Smokepaw had came.
It was dark and musky. With fur bristling, Smokepaw turned a corner and caught up with Sandpaw. "Slow down. It's not a race." She panted.
"Oh, oh! Can it be?" Sandpaw's paws were light but big. Her pads were covered with fur, that's probably why she was so good with muck.
Smokepaw shook her head. "My paws are not as strong as yours, I can't run through this sticky soil."
Sandpaw chuckled, "It's because you're trudging."
The grey apprentice looked up. "So?"
"You have to keep light on your paws." Sandpaw explained, looking at her paws and tipping her claws against the soil. "Like hunting a mouse. Try to keep your claws pointed into the dirt though, or you'll sink!"
This apprentice sure was a good listener to her mentor. Smokepaw would never have the patience to listen to a lecture from a cat from a higher rank.
"Got it." Smokepaw nodded and looked at her paws. She unsheathed her claws and dug them into the ground. Dirty water slid into her paws' pads. "How do you...uh...deal with the cold?" Smokepaw shivered as her pads soaked into the earth.
Sandpaw scampered forward, but turned back. "If you didn't stand there like a dead fox it wouldn't be cold! Remember you must be quick to catch the mouse."
Be quick to catch the mouse, Smokepaw repeated in her head, I can do this.
As Sandpaw had taught her, Smokepaw hurried forward. Every

claw lifted out of the soil quickly as she went to the next paw.
"It's over here!" Sandpaw meowed, shifting her steps towards a fallen tree that was drowning in mud.
Smokepaw stiffened. It was clearly not safe to enter. "Are you sure it's safe?"
Then, the cream-coloured apprentice returned on the other side of the bay with lots of dry moss in a massive rhubarb leaf.
"Woah!" Smokepaw fell backwards into the dirt water as Sandpaw threw the tied leaf at her. She heard laughing, so Smokepaw got up and scampered forward.
Unexpectedly, Smokepaw launched herself at Sandpaw. Her muddy fur sprayed water all over the moor as Sandpaw sunk into the mud.
"Hey!" She growled. Quickly, Sandpaw ripped a lilypad off of the dirt and whipped it at Smokepaw, sending her to tumble off.
Once she regained balance, Smokepaw blinked and she was thrown off of her feet.
"Be quick to catch the mouse!" Sandpaw hissed playfully and shoved herself at Smokepaw in the dirt water.
She blinked again, and Sandpaw was on top of her. With a smile, Smokepaw spit mud onto Sandpaw's chin and she backed up in sudden disgust. She laughed and pushed her back into the mud.

It was way past sunhigh when they had returned. Their pelts were destroyed of their natural colour, replaced by thick layers of dried mud.
Cats stared as the two entered camp with two rhubarb leaf-wrapped moss sockets in each of their mouths. Neither one stopped to hunt for prey.
They were nearly in the middle of the clearing when Snowstream and Halfwind stormed at them. Their eyes pale with distrust and disloyalty.
"You've been gone since sunup!" Snowstream scolded.
"How embarrassing! I've got an apprentice that can fight like a warrior but fetch moss like a kit!" Halfwind snarled.
Sandpaw's bright, cheery face hid underpaw and was replaced with fear and shame. She slunk back in misery, apologetically.
When Smokepaw caught her eye, she knew she had to play along. It was like some kind of friend code. So, Smokepaw hung her head by her paws. "I'm sorry. We won't do it again." She meowed.
Halfwind dipped her head, accepting her apology. "Thank you, and

I hope you will have learned your lesson by the time you're finished cleaning the elders den all by yourselves-including picking out their fleas. No other apprentice is to help you." The deputy looked at Snowstream, "Do you think that is a fair punishment?"
"Very." The white warrior replied, wrapping her tail around her paws neatly. "Afterwards, we'll go hunting and finish up some assessments."
The two apprentices' eyes shown brightly now that she mentioned it.
"After!" Halfwind snapped.
Smokepaw smiled but rolled her eyes. She began to lick the dirt off her pelt as she washed Sandpaw do the same.
"Let's get it done before sundown and maybe we can still hunt without being blind!" Sandpaw purred, lifting her head up with a jolt and racing off towards the elders' den.
At her haunches, Smokepaw trotted with a purr-rumbling throat.

All day, Sandpaw had taught Smokepaw how to hold the mousebile just right so the foul-tasting sting didn't get to her tongue. She also taught éé her how to pick out the dirty moss from the clean moss to reuse it. Sandpaw had said they use that technique for leafbare, and since it was nearing, they had to practice.
The sun was lowering in the sky. Purple rays darted up from the hiding sun, casting long shadows among the trees. Silverpelt had just started to show when they finished.
Snowstream poked her head into the elders' den and watched them finished up.
They padded over to her, Smokepaw wishing just to get some rest. They worked all day in the elders' den and playing out in the mud.
"You worked long and hard today. MapleClan appreciates your loyalty, Smokepaw. And MapleClan appreciates your leadership, Sandpaw." Snowstream purred, wiping her tail across their chests.
Halfwind was not far off rom her, but she turned the corner and padded over to join them. "I think you're ready to take your final assessment." The deputy waited for their eyes to shine with pride, to add, "Tomorrow."
Smokepaw sighed in relief. Both of her back legs were aching. Her forepaws hurt from pressing mousebile and her jaws hurt from squeezing mousebile. "Thank you both for your generosity and for making it clear my destiny lays here with MapleClan." She meowed,

giving a faint yawn.
"It is our honour to have you as a MapleClan cat."
"And it is mine to be a MapleClan cat."

Chapter 22

Smokepaw's jaws sowed shut. She couldn't speak, she couldn't do anything. Her entire body was glued to the ground. Where am I? She growled in her head.
But then, it echoed again. "One cat is bold, yet another will hold! The Clan will soon mourn, and so will you; be torn!"
Smokepaw's head jolted back as she realized Adderstrike's nose was a whisker away from hers. She tried to growl, snarl, yowl, anything, at the fox-hearted cat. Her claws pinned to the floor, forcing her to stay back.
"Don't act like that!" The rogue snapped, clawing at Smokepaw's ear. She ducked in time to dive away.
Adderstrike chuckled. "You didn't think I actually killed your sister, did you?"
Smokepaw stared at him in amazement. Willowpaw wasn't dead?!
"The only way to reverse the prophecy was to stay in CloudClan! They're mourning your loss!" He snarled, insulting her image badly.
Smokepaw felt hot on every part of her body. W-what?!
Adderstrike laughed painfully, trying to stop himself from choking on his own evil laughter. "You mousebrain! I could attack from right here and you wouldn't do anything about it!"
Yes I would! Let me free and let me at you! You'll be crowfood! Smokepaw scoffed angrily.
"The prophecy isn't fulfilled by you, Smokepaw, the prophecy is you!" The dark warrior threw his head back laughing once again.
The prophecy is you!
The prophecy is you!
The prophecy is you!
The words corrupted her head and she put her paws over her ears after suddenly realizing she had been set free. "Make it stop! Make it stop!!"

Sandpaw's face stared into Smokepaw's as her eyes shot open. Her sides heaved up and down as quick as a frightened rabbit.
"What's wrong?" She meowed with wide, concerned eyes. "Did you speak with StarClan?"

A cat pushed her out of the way. Her long white-and-orange-patched pelt dangled above her face as the medicine cat reached over her.
"Honeywhisker! Be careful!" Sandpaw warned.
Honeywhisker purred reassuringly. "It's okay Sandpaw, I know what I'm doing." The cat brushed her long pelt over Smokepaw's stomach. "Cardinalpaw? Get back here with that feverfew!"
The medicine cat apprentice turned back right away and padded directly towards them. "This is used as an anti-hallucinate medication. It will help you more after Cardinalpaw puts some poppyseed inside of it, okay?"
Cardinalpaw looked restless, but he still met Smokepaw's gaze and turned away back to the storage den.
When he returned, a bundle of leaves hung from his jaws.
"That's yarrow!" Honeywhisker rasped harshly, getting up from her place and taking the sac of herbs. "You stay here while I fetch the right herbs!" She turned and stormed off.
Cardinalpaw sat down, his eyes barely open.
Laying on a nest of moss, Smokepaw felt bad for him. Being a medicine cat must have been a hard job. She turned to him and smiled. "One day it'll be worth it." Smokepaw mewed kindly.
Sandpaw's jaw almost fell out of her mouth when Cardinalpaw smiled back at her. "I sure hope so," He replied, "If not, then my life isn't worth living." The Tom gave a slight chuckle, but almost fell asleep in the middle of his sentence. He laid down and yawned, looking at Smokepaw with grateful eyes.
Even though she had not known this cat for very long, she felt a friendly connection with him already. "I don't need these herbs she's going to give me." Smokepaw shook her head smiling.
"I know-" Cardinalpaw stopped himself from finishing.
The grey apprentice's head fell to the side. "What was that?"
"Oh, um, nothing." He twisted his facial expression and Smokepaw shook her head. "Just that she should be giving you just poppyseeds. It will ease your pain and help you sleep without kicking Sandpaw anymore." Cardinalpaw looked over his shoulder and winced.
"She's probably got a sore rump because o'you!" Honeywhisker set down a few borage petals and poppyseeds.
Cardinalpaw shook his head. "You do know that's borage leaves, not feverfew?"

"O'course I know that! Do ya think I've gone mad?" The medicine cat replied sternly.
The Tom bowed his head.
Honeywhisker pushed the leaves closer to Smokepaw as she edged away. "Can I just take the poppyseeds?" She mewed with a sweet smile.
The medicine was going to scowl, but remembered the fight from a moon ago. The images portraited in her eyes. "O'course darlin'."
Smokepaw smiled again and gulped down the poppyseeds. She huffed and blinked herself awake. "Do you think I'll be able to go on my final assessment today?" Smokepaw flinched at the thought of not getting her warrior name today like she'd been promised. Actually, they promised the final assessment would be today, but the ceremony must be before moonhigh!
"Surely Halfwind will take ya." Honeywhisker rasped, flicking her tail at what seemed to be Cardinalpaw's nest. It was a small bundle of moss, just big enough to fit him in if he curled up tight enough.
Smokepaw chuckled. "May I?"
"Go ahead m'dear!"
Sandpaw jumped to her paws excitedly. "Let's go!" She zoomed past the medicine cat and raced towards the warriors' den.
Smokepaw purred her goodbye and darted after her close Clanmate. Her long legs came to a quick halt when the two warriors emerged at Sandpaw's sides.
"That was quick." She purred as Halfwind sniffed the air.
The deputy glanced back and forth from Sandpaw to Smokepaw. "It's going to storm. Are you sure you want to go now?"
"Yes!" Sandpaw burst out, leaping to her paws.
Snowstream purred. "Then we have no reason to stop you." She said, sitting down and folding her tail over her paws. "Do you know what to do?"
Smokepaw nodded, but Sandpaw leaned in as if not knowing the answer-or just wanting a repeat just to make sure.
"You must hunt for the Clan until we tell you it's okay to come back." Halfwind explained. She kept her standing position, pulling her ears back against the slight wind. "If coming back to camp before we tell you that you can, your training will be pushed another moon."
Smokepaw's eyes slipped open a little more than she had willing. Would they really do that to twelve-moon-old apprentices?

Sandpaw nodded, so Smokepaw did the same. "I understand," The cream cat vowed, "We will not come back until you grant our permission."
The deputy looked at Snowstream and they shook their head with a smile. "Very well, go on then." Halfwind meowed.
Wind made Smokepaw's fur bristle, but it didn't stop her from feeling the same tinge of excitement that Sandpaw had no fear of expressing.
The apprentices stood up immediately and rushed over to the exit. Smokepaw stopped to look back, but Sandpaw almost ran her over. "Hey!" She growled.
"Sorry." Smokepaw started slow, but began to gallop across the marsh.
Not far behind, Sandpaw raced alongside. "I'll take this side, you go over there. It'll be better if we split up."
Smokepaw nodded her agreement and turned the other way so her tail faced Sandpaw's fading image.
She began to limp through the muddy undergrowth, trailing her own path, sniffing the scents of prey at every tree and corner.
Stormy clouds rumbled in overhead, covering the early moon that tried to show itself. The stars managed to twinkle brighter, lighting Smokepaw's path into a musky abandoned den.
Its crooked tree roots stuck out of the bracken and marsh like rusty old claws. Her jaws separated to grasp the air in her mouth. Smokepaw's eyes narrowed as she entered the pine trees.
The den was nearly three tail lengths away when Smokepaw's ears perked at a sudden twitching sound behind her. She turned quietly and watched as a vole picked it's way under a barb of comfrey root. She lifted her nose, smelling the air for direction. When the winds told her they were headed towards her, she loosened her tight grip on the soil and stalked towards the vole.
A hole under the comfrey root stood in the way of Smokepaw catching one of her Clanmate's meals, but she knew she had four paws and four legs. Anything was possible if you had it in you.
"Hi-yah!" Smokepaw launched herself at the vole and grasped onto both sides of the comfrey root.
She could hear the tiny meal panicking inside the enclosed area. She lifted a paw tolet it out, and when it went running, Smokepaw killed it with a quick nip to the neck.

The storm continued to rumble over the apprentice's head. Her stomach growled as the smell of freshkill wafted up her nose again. But as the warrior code told her, the Clan must be fed first. Smokepaw had caught two finches, lots of minnows swimming around the watery moor, mice and voles, and other prey. Out of all of the hunting, Smokepaw enjoyed herself most while catching minnows. Scooping them out with one paw was her favourite thing to try at.
A rustle came from the shadowed bushes, making Smokepaw's hackles raise. She snarled before she caught the scent of Halfwind. Without thinking, she sat up and calmly lapped at her paw.
"You have done well." The deputy dipped her head and purred, flicking her tail back to the bushes where Snowstream appeared behind her.
The warrior purred as well, "We took turns watching you two." She meowed, turning away and leaping back into the green leaves. Smokepaw dipped her head politely and forced herself forward, following Snowstream down the slope and back into the muddy moors.
Halfwind came not far behind. Her fur lifted half way as she sniffed the air from time and time.
Although the storm was rolling in faster now, the deputy didn't seem interested in it. "We must press forward and-"
Sandpaw leapt out of the ferns and surprised them all. "You guys know you're downwind, right? I could smell you when you started coming for me!" She mewed and touched Smokepaw's chest with her tail tip.
The three cats shook their heads at Sandpaw, but Smokepaw found herself the only one purring. Did they take this that seriously? She wondered, falling into sitting place with Sandpaw.
"Snowstream, you can take Sandpaw to packup her fresh kill and meet us back at camp by moonhigh at the latest." Halfwind ordered, flicking her tail back where Sandpaw emerged. "As for us," -she gazed down at Smokepaw although she was almost the same size as her- "We will have to find some rhubarb leaves to carry all those minnows!"
Smokepaw giggled. This the first time she had laughed in a long time. "Sandpaw said there is some there," She pointed with her nose to the large broken tree suck up in the mud. "She showed me them before."

The deputy nodded and Smokepaw raced off to find some.

Chapter 23

When she came back, Smokepaw saw that Halfwind had already collected all of her freshly caught prey. The scent made her face fur bristle with hunger.
"Let's get back to camp." Her mentor suggested, wrapping the small fish in the rhubarb leaves.
Smokepaw nodded her agreement and picked it up, along with a heavy rabbit that hung off her back limply. Halfwind helped put it there, even though Smokepaw insisted her do it on her own.
The two headed back for camp, meeting Snowstream and Sandpaw along the way. The cream apprentice and her mentor has to gallop to stay in step with them.
All that Smokepaw wanted to do now was sleep. She felt like she was going to collapse and sleep for a moon. But as the others did, she stayed in between Sandpaw and Halfwind.
They all came back into MapleClan camp together, walking in on the others sharing tongues.
They must have already had their share of the fresh kill pile.
Smokepaw blinked the tiredness out of her eyes and acted like she was wide awake.
"Would you like to share this rabbit with me, Sandpaw?" Smokepaw asked, launching the hare onto the dirt beside her.
The cream-coloured cat purred, "I'd love to."
Smokepaw dipped her head and hauled the rabbit over to the apprentices' den. Her paws began to ache with the pressure of the long day they had. She watched as Sandpaw pranced at her side as she dropped into a slouch. By her paws, the rabbit's fresh smell made her bite her way into it.
Still purring, Sandpaw did the same. Her peach ears ducked down beside Smokepaw's as they ate side by side and the moon shone brightly over their heads.

The forest was dimmed by the clouds that covered the moon. Billows of fog flooded the air as Smokepaw trailed into the quiet meadow. She had never been here before.
"Halt!" growled a cat from behind her.

Another appeared in from of her, it's eyes glowing like green fireflies in the fog. "Let's chase her out!"
"Pull her whiskers out!" hissed another, coming up by her side and batting her hips.
Smokepaw pulled back, drawing her lips back in a snarl in her defence. Her fur stood on end as she backed into another cat that attacked her at first sight.
The cat's claws shredded her flank, baring its teeth and heading in for a shot at her front paws. Another feline reared up and hit Smokepaw in the nose, causing blood to shed.
The three yowled as Smokepaw snarled and batted them all away, hissing and clawing. Her tail lashed back and forth angrily as she backed away slowly from the stalking cats as they grew closer to her.
Then, the first feline leaped forward, heading for a grab at Smokepaw's face when another cat jumped out of the fog and hit it with both of her rears. This cat's fur was silky and smooth, her eyes glittered a shattering, emerald green. She faced Smokepaw with a smile then disappeared.
To her surprize, all the other cats had began to race away, howling in distress. None of them dared to stop and look back.
One blink and Smokepaw was awoken in her nest. She then realized she hadn't have got her warrior name yet because she must have fallen asleep.
Her head raised from the soft moss underpaw. As the smell of the MapleClan forest sunk into her fur, Smokepaw sat up and looked around. Sandpaw was not beside her. Shaking her head, Smokepaw lifted up and poked her head out of the apprentices' den.
Sandpaw was at the other side of the clearing by the warriors' den, speaking with Snowstream. Her tail was lashing back and forth excitedly. Smokepaw assumed her mentor told her they'd be warriors soon.
She padded over to them and sat down by Sandpaw.
"Did you hear that?" The cream apprentice mewed, amazement gleaming in her eyes.
Smokepaw smiled, "No, but I can probably guess." She gazed into her Clanmate's eyes and purred, "Are we going to be warriors now?"
"Soon." Halfwind corrected, stepping out of behind Snowsteam's waving tail.
Sandpaw nodded and perked her ears up. She sniffled unexpectedly.

"Can anyone else smell that?" She mewed, screwing up her face.
The warrior and deputy looked at eachother and smelled the air, wincing at the unfamiliar scent that wafted their noses.
Snowstream's tail lashed back and forth as she stepped forward, fixing her eyes on the air.
Smokepaw did the same. She instantly dug her claws into the dirt and smelled again. Her fur bristled when she recognized the scent; Adderstrike.
The rogue must be looking for her! Smokepaw flinched. What if he is planning to do the same thing that he did to Willowpaw? She shivered and pinched her eyes together, pulling down and shaking her head.
"What is it, Smokepaw?" Sandpaw dipped her head to meet with her level.
But Smokepaw turned away. She sighed, then looked up. "I recognize he's scent." She closed her eyes before being able to contemplate their expressions. Almost shivering again, Smokepaw stayed strong, although she knew Adderstrike was stronger and probably in more power than she is.
"Who's scent?" Halfwind stomped her paw in front of Smokepaw, deliberately reminding her of Lionstripe.
Smokepaw winced, tensing her muscles. "Do you think I brought him here?" She challenged, "Are you doubting my loyalty only because there is a rogue in the area?"
Before she could draw her lips back, Halfwind answered, "Is there a harm in my questioning?" She gave a defiant glare before sliding herself back and looking at the sky once again, ignoring her apprentice.
With a huff of satisfaction, Smokepaw praised her winning. "It's Adderstrike's scent." She mewed, shaking now at the smell of the close warrior. It felt as if he was breathing down her neck.
"Is there a problem with that?"
The deep growl made Smokepaw jump and pelt behind and around her mentor to her side. Sandpaw's eyes struck with horror and she ran behind Snowstream instantly.
A huge dark brown tabby had crawled out from the ferns. Now, he towered over them. His foul breath filled the camp, as well as his undisguised scent. He flexed his long claws at Smokepaw's paws and smirked, baring his teeth in a snarl.
"Get out!" Halfwind hissed, stepping forward but only matching half

the warrior's size.
"Kill him!" yowled Snowstream.
Smokepaw's eyes widened as warriors poured out of all the dens and hurled themselves at Adderstrike.
The tabby's massive paws threw them all away, as well as his long, lashing, decapitating tail. He shouldered his way through the crowd of CloudClanners with no doubts.
Without thinking, Smokepaw raced after him. But, not to fight. It would be impossible to beat him at her size! Her paws carried her up to his side. Cats all around backed up with traitorous loyalty in their eyes. Smokepaw knew they were doubting her now.
"Hey!" She yowled up at the invading rogue. Her claws dug into his thick-furred paw and managed to draw blood. "If you're anything like the bad-cat you think you are, come face me!"
Adderstrike turned his head and peered down at the apprentice. She was hardly half his size.
Smokepaw's heart lurched. StarClan, help me!

Chapter 24

The invading Adderstrike snarled and lifted his paw with unsheathed claws. He looked like an oddly- coloured badger with his size and fangs.
"Come at me!" Smokepaw yowled again, watching his paw swing at her. She ducked and raced around his hind legs, tearing her claws at the backs of his legs.
Other cats attacked as well, shaking no fear as that and Smokepaw hissed and growled in rage, the intruder's thick fur.
Sandpaw was surprisingly on Adderstrike's neck. She was reared before sinking her sharp teeth into his ear and swinging off.
Foxlight and Blackfoot were battling his sides, pushing into his stomach at the same time. Their claws ripped through Adderstrike's muscles as the rogue began to fall to his belly.
Firepaw and Owlpaw were sawing at his tail, drawing blood, snarling, and pulling him down.
The outnumbered rogue yowled as almost the whole Clan hissed and fought bravely to bring him down. His tail tried to lash back in forth and his muzzle growled in anger and fear of being beat.
Blackfoot backed up as Foxlight stepped aside. Their pelts shining with fresh blood. Firepaw and Owlpaw ran off to the side of the camp once Adderstrike's tail drooped and stopped flailing. They began to lick their fur and rid his blood.
Sandpaw hung her head at Adderstrike's face. Her sides were heavily heaving. She had done well; for she was one who did the most damage.
At his rear, Smokepaw padded around the defeated rogue. Her claws still unsheathed with Adderstrike's fur inside their slits. She sat and looked down at him with heavily-breathing sides. "Why, Adderstrike?" Smokepaw whispered, then sighed. "You hunt with the Dark Forest now."
She turned to face Sandpaw. The cream apprentice was looking at her, dazed. "Did you know him?" She whispered.
"Yes." Smokepaw replied.
"We're you close?" Sandpaw asked.
The grey apprentice put her head down and pinned her ears back.

"He visited me in my dreams." Her words were quietly swept away from the air's grasp.
Sandpaw tilted her head to the side but asked no questions.
A yowl split the air, "All cats old enough to catch their own prey gather here beneath the Highrock."
The two apprentices turned and saw Onestar on the Highrock.
We're going to be warriors! Smokepaw thought to herself, trotting over to the Highrock to sit in the front. As she did, Sandpaw sat beside her with pride gleaming in her eyes.
"Now, I know we just had chaos pass us by, but two well-trained apprentices fought very bravely tonight and I know now they deserve their warrior names." The leader stood tall and looked down on her Clan.
Their mentors sat behind them, looking proudly down at their two successful apprentices.
"Smokepaw. Sandpaw. Step forward please." The leader called.
The two stepped forward with shining eyes.
"I, Onestar, leader of MapleClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as a warrior in their turn." Onestar looked down at the two, smiling. Smokepaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"
"I do." Smokepaw nodded.
Onestar turned to the cream apprentice, "Sandpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"
"I do!" Sandpaw mewed.
"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Smokepaw, from this moment you will be known as Smokefur." - The leader took a moment to look at Halfwind taking pride in having Smokepaw as an apprentice- "StarClan honors your courage and loyalty, and we welcome you as a full warrior of MapleClan."
The Clan was silent still, and Onestar went on, "Sandpaw, by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. From this moment you will be known as Sandheart. StarClan honors your battle skills and honesty, and we welcome you as a full warrior of MapleClan."
The leader backed up and the crowd yowled, "Smokefur! Sandheart! Smokefur! Sandheart!"

Smokefur's eyes shone with amazement and glory as she glanced at Sandheart who did the same. They looked back at the warriors and other Clanmates who purred their congratulations.
I'm a warrior, and my name is Smokefur. The new warrior praised herself and her new title. She was very happy to be moving into the warriors den now-after so long of being an apprentice.
"Congratulations, Smokefur!"
A mew from behind her made her jump. Smokefur turned and smiled at the friendly face. "Thanks, Cardinalpaw." She felt bad for him. He would never get to be a warrior, or even have his own warrior ceremony.
"It must be great to have your name so quickly," The medicine cat apprentice mewed, flicking his tail back and forth.
Smokefur nodded. It definitely was worth training hard for.
"So...er...what made you want to become a medicine cat?" She tried to keep her voice low, avoiding all eyes on them.
Cardinalpaw lowered his head but held his gaze. "I had a dream and was told by StarClan." He whispered, shuffling his paws. His ears pinned back against the tough wind.
"Cardinalpaw!" A shout called him back.
Smokefur glanced behind him and saw Echoleaf. Her long, black fur was waving. Cardinalpaw turned and padded back to her, swishing his tail across Smokefur's neck before disappearing into the medicine cat den.
"Hey!" Sandheart's voice sounded from behind her.
She turned her head and smiled gently back at her friend. "Hello." Smokefur purred.
"He's a medicine cat apprentice." The cream warrior pushed her paw across Smokefur's face forcefully, but not hard enough to hurt her.
"I know!" She snapped.
"Then quit being so flirtatious." Sandheart turned and pointed her muzzle at the warriors' den. "Everyone's watching, you know." She hung her head as Firepaw and Owlpaw came out of their den.
Smokefur watched Sandheart's eyes as they fell upon Firepaw's head.
"Final assessment, here we come!" Owlpaw mewed and stormed past them, racing through the exit into the moor.
Firepaw was not far behind, but he returned Sandheart's gaze and then continued. His eyes filled with an unreadable expression.
"You're teasing me? Firepaw is as much use as a dead fox." She

shook her head, but held Sandheart's gaze.
The cream warrior looked back at her as if it were some awkward moment. "I don't like him." She started, but cut herself off, "Why don't you go help Honeywhisker find some catmint? I'm sure she'll need it, it's almost leafbare." Sandheart sniffed the air.
Smokefur felt honoured for her generous thoughts, but she was right; Cardinalpaw was going to be a medicine cat someday. Medicine cats are not aloud to have mates. She sighed. "Maybe later."
Sandheart tilted her head. "Then come, I was going to ask Onestar if we could go on a hunting patrol." She flicked her tail at the leader's den, but was interrupted by Halfwind behind them.
"Onestar is asleep. She has been very busy since Smokefur became a warrior. The CloudClan cats want her back." The deputy went on, sitting down after circling in front of the two. "But I think it is a lovely idea to go on a hunting patrol. Sandheart, will you lead?"
The warrior dipped her head.
"They want me back? Didn't you send Sunpool, Lionstripe, and Coalstorm back to CloudClan?" Smokefur's hackles raised slightly in doubt of her apprentice duties getting in the way of her being able to chase her old Clanmates off.
Halfwind held her chin high. "We did. But more keep running into our border patrols, ready to snatch you up and pull you back like a bunch of hungry badgers." She bared her fangs, staring off into the distance as if picturing the Smokefur-hungry CloudClan cats.
"Why do they want me back, anyways?" Smokefur turned her head and lapped at the back of her shoulder.
"I don't know, but I'll keep an eye out." Halfwind blinked and narrowed her eyes at Smokefur. "Blackfoot said he was attacked by some pale she-cat that kept calling your name."
Willowpaw! Smokefur got to her paws. "W-What? Did he say anything else?"
The deputy shook her head. "No, but he's in the warriors' den now-"
Smokefur hardly heard her last words, she leapt across the clearing and raced for her den. "Blackfoot?" She meowed over herself heaving for breaths.
The black-pawed warrior lifted his head from his nest and perked up his ears. "Smokefur?" He whispered.
"Yeah, it's me." She stepped forward and headed for the back of the den where Blackfoot was curled up in a spread-out sheet of moss.

"Can I ask you a few questions?" Smokefur asked, laying down beside him.
"What is it?" The warrior growled, putting his head back down on his paws.
"It's about that pale she-cat you told Halfwind about...on the patrol." Smokefur leaned in and perked her ears up only to hear him rumble.
Then, Blackfoot lifted his head again and looked Smokefur in the eye. "What about her?" He murmured and narrowed his eyes.
"What exactly did she look like?" Smokefur stared back at him. If Willowpaw is still alive, I have to be on a patrol as soon as the next one leaves!
"Sand coloured fur, green eyes, probably a medicine cat by her horrible herb-scent." Blackfoot's eyes filled with sudden worry for himself. "But she had really long claws, so I don't know for sure."
Smokefur lifted her paw to her face and unsheathed her claws. Long, and sharp. "Thank you, Blackfoot." She lifted herself up and padded quickly across the clearing.
She purposely made herself run into Halfwind. "May I go on a border patrol?"
The deputy was startled. "Smokefur! Er..sure. But not by-"
"CloudClan territory, please." Smokefur lifted her chin as if knowing Halfwind knew her loyalty.
With a sigh, Halfwind nodded and flicked her tail towards the set of warriors at the entrance. Silverclaw, Tigerfrost, and Snakepaw were waiting for the deputy to lead. "Fine, you'll take my place as the lead." Halfwind turned and trotted off to the leader's den.
Smokefur stood proud and watched her go, then turned and went to the patrol team. "Halfwind made me lead, let's go."
They looked at eachother quickly, then followed, heading straight for the scent lines. No one spoke a word, just as Smokefur wanted. She only wished Willowpaw was on the next CloudClan patrol.
"What are you going to do, Smokefur?" Snakepaw broke the silence. His broad shoulders pushed past Silverclaw. He was almost bigger than her.
Smokefur huffed. "Show them not to mess with MapleClan cats."
Tigerfrost gave an amused purr.
Silverclaw pitched in, "Yeah right, she probably just wants to share tongues with her old Clanmates." She shook her head with a playful smile.

"CloudClan is weak from the fights with MapleClan" Smokefur hissed.
"That pale cat is one brave she-cat then. She's been on every border patrol since you came." Silverclaw sounded sort of worried.
Snakepaw gazed at her. "What will you do if they take you?"
"They won't."
Tigerfrost stopped. "You know? For sure?" He craned his neck and tilted his head.
"Keep moving, mousebrain!" Silverclaw pushed his rump and shouldered her way past him through the moor into the forest land.
Smokefur sighed to herself. Not really, I just have a strong hope... She replied in her head, jumping over a fallen alder tree and waiting for the patrol to be behind her.
"The border isn't far now." Snakepaw whispered in her ear, "it's not too late to turn back."
"I'm not a kittypet! Do you all think I'm not capable of handling this?" Smokefur yowled, spinning around and stepping back. "This is CloudClan we're talking about! The Clan of the old and weak. I'm not fox-hearted, I would never turn on my true Clanmates."
"S-Smokepaw?" Barely a whisper sounded behind her.
Smokefur whipped around, ready to attack with hackles raised high. "Willowpaw?!"

Chapter 25

As they walked out of camp, Smokefur noticed the old scent of CloudClan became stale as if they gave up trying to get Smokefur back into their camp. She claw- ed herself over a trunk as Snakefang followed. The grey feline lifted her head. "Sandheart showed me a moss tree a moon ago," Smokefur glanced at the moor ahead of them. "I'm sure its still there."
Snakefang jetted after her, not saying a word and keeping his distance. He followed until they reached a huge trunk that stuck out of the ground.
It was weirdly sinking into the muck slowly. There was heaps of dry moss hanging from the top. "Doesn't look very safe..."
She didn't hear the rest of his sentence. Smokefur leapt up onto it and hung herself on a branch. Her claws unsheathed and they dug into the bark. "Come on Snakefang. You don't want to freeze tonight, do you?" She hissed and heaved herself up to the top.
The trunk rattled and fell deeper into the soil. "Well, I do, but..."
"Get up here, furball! I'm not making your nest on my own!" Smokefur growled, tiptoeing down the bark, hooking her claws on each of the tips.
Snakefang shrugged his fear away and followed her up, clawing at the bark, then reaching for another branch until he reached the top. It was slippery and the truck wobbled under their weight.
Smokefur rolled her eyes and fell to the side. She hooked herself and pulled back up. The sinking tree rolled with her. "Uh, Snakefang?" Smokefur called, now scratching herself free. Nothing was working.
The new warrior knew nothing of it. His fear of heights got the best of him and distracted him as he stared horrified at the muck under the shaking tree.
It shivered through the thick wind. "Snakefang!" Smokefur yowled with wide eyes. Her arms stretched across the trunk and she hung, scratching her hind legs at its bark.
Snakefang snapped out of his shock and turned over to the hanging feline. His eyes shrunk, but he pushed himself onwards up the trunk. "S-Stay strong." Snakefang whispered, trying not to look

down.
"Help!" Smokefur yowled as the tree twisted into the mud again. Her paws dipped in the sand and sunk in with it. She shivered and pulled them out.
The warrior dipped his head and sunk his fangs into her scruff, not even tight enough to hurt her.
"Pull me up, sapface!" She hissed loudly, now shaking with fear of the floor under her that closed over her tail.
Snakefang tightened his grip, ignoring Smokefur's tiny squeal of pain, and yanked on her pelt. His foot slipped in a hole and he pulled his head up in pain.
She clawed at the trunk and under his paws, helping him pull herself up. With a heavy sigh, Smokefur laid on her stomach and felt the trunk sink under her. "Let's get off." She quivered and lifted herself to her paws.
"Good thinking," Snakefang meowed and licked his sore foot. He turned and snatched the moss that was left uncovered with muck. Smokefur pulled some off too, following him down the stems where they came up. She leapt off right away and landed on her paws, looking at Snakefang gratefully. "Thanks," Smokefur sighed in relief. The warrior dipped his head and turned back towards the path they used when coming.
The grey she-cat purred and rubbed against him. "I mean it," she meowed, gazing at him. "I wouldn't be alive now if it weren't for you."
Snakefang purred back at her. "Any warrior would have done it." He replied, sounding surprised at her sudden affection.
"But you did it. I'll never be able to repay you." Smokefur rubbed her head against his neck. Her heart pounded, feeling touched.
"Smokefur," Snakefang looked at her in the eye. He paused for a short moment. "I love you." He meowed, purring.
Smokefur blinked. "I love you too, Snakefang."
Perhaps she would have a mate.

Sandheart met them at the entrance. "Hey, you." She glanced between them and purred. "Smokefur, would you come with me on a hunting patrol?"
"First," Snakefang replied first, "I have to go speak with Onestar. Smokefur must stay in camp." He touched Smokefur's muzzle with his.

The cream warrior opened her eyes wide. "Let me know when you can." She looked confused at Snakefang then padded over to Halfwind by the Highrock.
Smokefur purred and dropped her moss by the warriors' den. "I will tell her." She turned for Onestar's den. "You can stay and make your nest." Smokefur silenced him with her tail and walked away towards Onestar was the leader emerged from her den. "Hello Onestar."
"Greetings, Smokefur. What is it? I was just about to call a Clan meeting." The leader pointed her muzzle at the Highrock.
"I understand," Smokefur dipped her head respectfully, "I just wanted to let you now that Snakefang and I are now mates."
Onestar turned her head with a surprised expression. "I'm glad you've found a Tom for yourself." She purred, "Might as well add it to the meeting." The leader leapt up and called to the Clan, "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather here beneath the Highrock for a Clan meeting."
Blackfoot followed Snakefang out of the warriors' den, Foxlight right behind them.
The first sight of Silverclaw made a shiver of guilt sway down Smokefur's spine. The light grey cat stepped out of the medicine cats' den, looking around the clearing. She took a seat beside Blackfoot and grunted.
"First, we have a new pair of mates; Snakefang and Smokefur!" Onestar announced proudly. She waited for mews of applause stormed around the crowd. "Second, we have three kits who have reached six moons old." Onestar gazed down at the wriggling triplets. "Skykit, Cloudkit, Patchkit, step forward please."
Skykit, a pretty white she-kit, pounded forward with wide eyes, blind in one and clear in the other. Her two brothers were crawling around behind her, but they straightened when the leader called on them. Patchkit's fluffy orange-dappled ears perked up, repeated by Cloudkit, a light grey-furred Tom-kit.
"You have all reached the age of six moons, and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Skypaw, Cloudpaw, and Patchpaw. Skypaw, your mentor will be Tigerfrost. Cloudpaw, your mentor will be Sandheart. Patchpaw, your mentor will be Smokefur."
I'm a mentor!
Onestar went on, "I hope they will pass down all they know to you."

Smokefur bounded to Patchpaw's side and touched noses with the new apprentice as the Clan called the new apprentices' and yowled out their names. After, Patchpaw and Cloudpaw went to greet their family while Skypaw nuzzled Tigerfrost.
The half-blind apprentice hardly noticed her brothers scattering away to meet Cherryfeather, their mother. The queen smiled, both proud of her kits and happy to move back into the warriors' den. Smokefur knew she would feel the same.
Patchpaw turned over to Smokefur, smiling widely. "Can we go hunting? Could you teach me how to fight? Please! I wanna fight like you and Tigerfrost did when I was a little kit!" His eyes glowed, clearly happy to have Smokefur as his mentor.
"You still are a little kit." Tigerfrost grumbled as he past them. Skypaw had her head and tail high, copying her mentor's ignorance.
"You're misleading her," Smokefur glared at him and flicked her tail at his apprentice. "She is as cute as a newborn kit." She meowed and pulled Skypaw close with her tail.
The warrior growled in his throat. "She's going to be the best warrior in warrior cat history after I'm finished with her."
"More like the worst!" Cloudpaw spat, standing beside his new mentor, Sandheart.
The cream warrior shushed him with a brush of her tail, but spoke no words as she watched. "Are you going to take Patchpaw on a territory tour?" She meowed, changing the subject.
Tigerfrost beckoned Skypaw over to the entrance and they went out into the moor without another word.
"Yes! Yes! Will you, Smokefur? Please?" Patchpaw's eyes glittered as he gazed up at the warrior.
Smokefur was unsure. It had been a long day and she wanted anything but to go out into the moor. She was afraid of going back to the trunk...or had it already sunk? What would mark it for danger? What if they fell in-
Sandheart interrupted her thoughts. "I'm taking Cloudpaw."
Smokefur blinked. "We can go together." She meowed, looking back down at Patchpaw.
"Really? You mean it? Awe, thanks Smokefur! I'm so happy you're my mentor!" Patchpaw jumped out of his sitting position and raced Cloudpaw for the entrance.
"Slow down!"
Smokefur chased Patchpaw up the hill and down the slope after

teaching him how to run in the watery ground. She leaned forward and jumped up on top of him, rolling them both in the mud. Her head closed in around him. She underestimated his size, he was a lot smaller than her.
The apprentice ducked his head under her fur and didn't bother to squirm. His chest heaved as they fell apart and crashed into the forest part of the territory.
"I've never been here before," Patchpaw said out loud as he turned his head back and forth, looking around.
Smokefur sighed impatiently. "This is where we catch mice and forest birds." She told him, looking up into the trees. She wondered if Snakefang was looking at the stars too.
Patchpaw acknowledged her but meowed, "Where is Skypaw and Tigerfrost?" He looked behind them. "And Cloudpaw and Sandheart?"
"They went the other way to investigate on their own." She replied, looking the same way. "Would you like to try a bird hunting crouch?" Smokefur stretched out her long arms and flexed her unsheathed claws.
Patchpaw nodded and sat, waiting for a demonstration.
"Okay so I'll do it first, then you try it." Smokefur ordered, then bent down in a crouch. Her tail hung low behind her and she stepped forward slowly. "Do you see?" Her eyes shifted from the grass to Patchpaw's eyes. "If you keep your tail low, it won't see you. But you must focus on the fact that it will not be able to hear you." She explained, then stretched her paws out and leapt at a floating leaf. Smokefur lifted her head with triumph in her gaze as she held the leaf in her mouth.
"You look like a medicine cat, is what I see!" Patchpaw joked, "I got it, I promise." He mewed and dived down into the tall grass as quiet as a dead mouse. The apprentice stalked, but swished his tail back and forth. He licked his lips and jumped over the grass. Then, his tiny ears perked up. "Did I do it?" Patchpaw mewed anxiously.
Smokefur grunted. "You mustn't sway your tail. It will startle the bird and it'll fly away." She meowed sternly and watched him straighten up. "And, you can't lick your lips. The bird will smell and hear that, too." She nudged him back to the spot where she demonstrated it. "Try again."
The day went on, longer than ever, and Patchpaw got the hang of it. His version of the leap was different from the way Smokefur had

learned it, but it worked; and that's all that mattered. Patchpaw was different. He's styles of hunting and practicing were different too. It showed his unique side, and Smokefur enjoyed being around him more and more was the days went by.
"Can we try some battle moves now?" Patchpaw urged, rubbing his small, patched head against Smokefur's shoulder. He had grown bigger and he was almost half the size of a full-grown fox, more than half the size of Smokefur.
Cloudpaw fluffed out his chest. "As if you'd be able to scare off enemy warriors! You're as small as a kit, still!" His brother mocked.
"He's grown bigger than me, so why aren't you picking on me instead?" Skypaw glared at her defiant brother. One grey eye blinded from sight made her one of the weaker cats, but she proved herself to be as caring and loyal as any other.
Tigerfrost growled his opinion, "He's too afraid to, he knows you're the best of all them." He took pride in having a half-blind apprentice.
"Smokefur said I can use my size to conquer any enemy!" Patchpaw spat back. "I'll be the best warrior any of you have ever seen!"
Smokefur purred in amusement and pride in her apprentice.
"Hush now," Cherryfeather's voice approached them with care. "You will all have your chance to prove yourself during your final assessment in only two more moons." She meowed. Her voice was docile and calm.
But Cloudpaw felt as if he needed to be the best out of everyone, and he showed it well. "Two moons? Still? It feels like it's been forever!" He dramatically fell to his side and sighed loudly.
"It will pass soon enough." Halfwind meowed, passing by from the warriors' den to Onestar who was sitting outside her den.
Smokefur's purr slowed as she gazed at the entrance. They knew a lot already. Was it possible to do a review test? "Would it be possible if Sandheart, Tigerfrost and I could get you to take a review assessment?"
The three apprentices turned their heads to look at her. They were clearly unconvinced and confused. Skypaw fluffed out her fur and shook her head. "What's a review assessment?" She asked.
"It's when we let you go out alone and test you by your current skills," Sandheart replied. Smokefur knew she would like the idea. "Then we know which ones you must improve on."
Smokefur nodded after Sandheart glanced at her to get a yes-

you're-right response. "Exactly." She dipped her head to her friend and looked back at Patchpaw who was praising himself.
"I'll be the one with the most prey when I'm done!" Cloudpaw enjoyed the idea as it clung to him like a burr.
Patchpaw narrowed his eyes at his brother disbelievingly.
"Yeah, right." Skypaw growled under her breath.
"Hmph," Cloudpaw sneered at his sister, "We'll all see how much the half-blind cat will catch when the assessment is over! It'll hardly put a dent in the fresh kill pile." He added in a whisper.
The white apprentice hissed and batted her paw at Cloudpaw's face. "You don't know that! You're totally underestimating me." She flicked her tail as he fell off balance and purred victoriously.
"You're so weak, Cloudpaw." Patchpaw mewed with delight, cuffing a paw over his sister's ear playfully. "You won't be able to catch a mouse with that loud mouth of yours!"
Skypaw purred more when her light grey brother got up and marched over to the exit. "When do we start?" He asked, ignoring his less-serious siblings.

Chapter 26

Cherryfeather shook her head with a smile as Smokefur turned to Sandheart.
"Now, if you'd like." The cream warrior replied.
"Yay!" Patchpaw and Skypaw dashed out of the clearing and out into the moor with Cloudpaw storming up in front of them, babbling of how he should be first, being firstborn of the litter.
Smokefur shook her head. "We better get at it." She looked over at Tigerfrost who sighed angrily.
"She needs to learn patience," He scowled.
"All of them do," Sandheart replied lovingly.
Smokefur looked at the two who stared at each other as the leader addressed the Clan from the Highrock. "All cats old enough to catch their own prey gather here beneath the Highrock for a Clan meeting." She meowed formally.
She turned her head but padded out of the entrance into the moorlands.
"Smokefur, keep an eye on Cloudpaw for me, okay? I want to stay for Firepaw's warrior ceremony." Sandheart meowed and glanced over her shoulder to see Firepaw looking up at Onestar with wide, happy eyes.
"Sure," She meowed and headed out of the camp. With a sigh, Smokefur trotted after her apprentice, keeping the scent of Cloudpaw in her mind as well.
Her claws slid into the slimy earth as she prodded onwards, testing her apprentice and Sandheart's. She followed Patchpaw farther than Cloudpaw. No other cat would dare to enter this terrain. Smokefur glanced back at the light grey apprentice before going with Patchpaw. Her apprentice headed towards the Thunderpath.
Patchpaw sniffed the air. He was upwind, unable to detect Smokefur. As a monster blasted across the path, the apprentice backed up in terror. He shivered, then turned back.
In total half way through, Patchpaw gathered five huge frogs, a pawfull of minnows, two small rabbits, and birds that would stalk the fresh kill pile for moons. Overall, Smokefur was proud of him. Cloudpaw hardly caught anything. He was busy messing with

Skypaw. Tigerfrost had to come out and scare him off a few times to keep him away.
Mud tracked behind Patchpaw as Smokefur trekked after him. He sniffed again, just before Smokefur realized she was downwind. The apprentice lifted his head and looked around behind him. He didn't react, but smiled, probably eager to point out her mistake afterwards.
She watched closely as Patchpaw stalked his frogs and birds. He had a different way of doing it. He hid behind a briar patch, then jumped over and grasped both very-different prey in his mouth. As for mice, he lost every one he tried to catch. His claws slid over it's fur like air and it scrambled away from him and he didn't bother to go after it.
Smokefur was confused by his way, but it worked. She followed him around dirtplace and into MapleClan's half of Tallpines. Smokefur was surprised to see him shred a squirrel on his way through.
When it was nearly over, Patchpaw gathered all his prey to one place as he muttered to himself it would make it easier to bring back home. It stored in a closed burrow under a few roots. Smokefur leapt out of the ferns and stood in front of him. He looked startled, but tried to hide it. "Thank StarClan. I don't know if I can bring all of this prey back alone." He purred.
"You've done well." She complimented, pulling a rabbit onto his back and taking one onto hers. She grabbed a mouthful of frogs and birds and let him lead the way back to camp.
Smokefur went back out into the moor after dropping off Patchpaw's kill, realizing she'd forgotten Cloudpaw. Where was Sandheart? She trotted out into the mucky land and scented Cloudpaw right away. She followed his scent to a large oak where the light grey apprentice spun around with uncertainty.
"Hush," Smokefur looked behind him, at his stock. "Is that all you caught?" He meowed worriedly.
Cloudpaw nervously sniffed the air. "There wasn't much prey out here." He narrowed his eyes. "Why are you so interested, anyway?" He flexed his claws.
Surprised, Smokefur gritted her teeth and bit back a snarl. "I'm your assessor for today." Do you have a problem with that? She finished in her head.
"Where's Sandheart?" Cloudpaw snapped.

"She stayed behind for Firepaw's warrior ceremony." Smokefur answered with an irritated huff.
"Firebreeze." A Tom corrected from bend Smokefur. She looked over her shoulder at Sandheart and Firebreeze.
"Sandheart!" Cloudpaw glared at her, "Smokefur said you stayed behind for this sapface?" He glanced uneasily between his mentor and Firebreeze.
The new warrior stepped forward. "Sapface?" Firebreeze growled. His giant paw stomped in front of the apprentice.
"I'm not scared of some mentor-stealing mousebrain!" snapped Cloudpaw.
Firebreeze pulled his lips back in a snarl. "Me? Accusations!"
"Shut up." Smokefur muttered.
"I agree." Cloudpaw smirked a whisker away from Firebreeze's muzzle.
"You!" Sandheart growled, smacking her paw against Cloudpaw's shoulder. "Firebreeze is a warrior. I expect respect to be given." She silenced Firebreeze's winning smile right away.
His face straightened. "Thank you, Sandheart." He meowed formally.
"Hello?" Skypaw's mew made them all jump. "Tigerfrost and I are waiting for you slowpokes to get back." She hissed and disappeared back into the ferns. Her tail twisted against the stems.
Smokefur purred in amusement as Sandheart did the same. Cloudpaw rolled his eyes at his sister and raced after her, but Sandheart grabbed his tail. "Go grab that rabbit." She ordered.
Shocked of her demand, Cloudpaw turned back and grabbed the prey by the scruff. It was the biggest prey he got, and Patchpaw got triple his catch. It made Smokefur even more proud.

As they all entered camp, delight painted on the Cherryfeather's face. The hot wind pushed through her red pelt. "How did it go?" She purred and touched noses with Cloudpaw.
"Good," Sandheart answered, flicking her tail at her son. "But he hardly caught anything." She glared at Cloudpaw, annoyed by his foolishness.
Cherryfeather sighed, but groomed her son's ears lovingly. "He'll catch more later." She purred.
Smokefur huffed in disbelief. Yeah right! Patchpaw is way better than all of siblings and he knows it! She smiled and followed

Sandheart and Firebreeze to the warriors' den.
"Take that rabbit to the elders' den for Crookedwing and Losteye to share." Sandheart told Cloudpaw over her shoulder.
The light grey apprentice puffed out his chest. Cherryfeather giggled as Cloudpaw sighed in frustration and dragged the rabbit over to the elders' den.
Smokefur went into her own den and curled up in her nest. She huffed in relief, grateful that the day was finally coming to an end. Her tail curled over her nose and her paws tucked under her chest as she snuggled up beside Sandheart.
"I'm glad you're back." Snakefang's voice purred in her ear. He pressed up against her and laid down behind her, putting his head on her lower neck.
Smokefur purred her reply and dozed off.
She opened her eyes in a dark meadow. The moors were shrivelled up and dry, showing no life at all. Smokefur stared around her. Where am I? She asked in her head.
As the curves of the forest came to a stop, a huge cave showed itself to her. It's mouth opened like an adder's jaws, but bigger. Smokefur craved to follow her curiosity and go inside, but her head told her to stop and to not enter. "This must be Mothermouth. I never thought I'd see it with my own eyes."
A trickle of a light strange from the inside. Smokefur narrowed her eyes and peered around the cave. It didn't look dangerous. She moved forward, as quiet as a dead fox. Her eyes widened in fear, but she continued onwards.
The light grew as the outdoors died away behind her. Curiosity pricked at her paws as she gritted her teeth. Smokefur lowered her head as the bright glow came closer. She turned the corner and closed her eyes at the burst of light.
Smokefur blinked as her heart lurched in amazement. She barely squinted to see it, but a glowing rock stood in front of her. An open knot in the ceiling let moonlight in, only to hit the rock.
"My StarClan!" Smokefur stepped forward. "It's the Moonstone!" She opened her eyes to get a good look at it.
But the moon was suddenly quitting it's glow. Cloud began to burrow themselves around it, darkening the place with night-black air. No stars were visible, even without the clouds, Smokefur noticed.
Her ears twitched. "What's happening?" She yowled to the sky.

A apparition glimmered in the sky as the hole in the roof tore away into a huge hole. The cat in the sky was lit by very little stars, making movements only a medicine cat could decode.
"Smokefur!"
Smokefur lifted from her nest and shook her head. "What?" She hissed unexpectedly. "Is it bad to have a dream?"
"You kicked me!" Sandheart growled back.
Smokefur dipped her head. "Nightmare?" She smiled weakly, fixing her mistake.
"You keep fidgeting." Snakefang looked down at her worriedly. His tail intertwined with hers comfortingly.
A breeze made her shiver. "I haven't gone to the Moonstone yet..." Smokefur confessed. She knew all apprentices had to go to the Moonstone before they got their warrior names.
Sandheart tilted her head to the side. "Really?" She meowed, "CloudClan doesn't even bring their apprentices to the Moonstone? They suck." She muttered.
"It's almost halfmoon, maybe Honeywhisker will take Cardinalpaw and you." Snakefang suggested.
Cardinalpaw. The name rang in Smokefur's ears.
"Honeywhisker will die before halfmoon," muttered Blackfoot from the other side of the den.
"She's not that old!" Sandheart rolled her eyes.
"Go to sleep you three!" yowled Halfwind from the front of the den. Snowstream was sleeping beside her.
Sandheart huffed. "Can't I sit silent vigil with Firebreeze?"
"You've failed the silent part!" Snowstream growled from behind the deputy.
Smokefur touched her friend's chest with her tail. "No more kicking, I promise." She purred when Sandheart looked at her then laid down without argument.
Moments passed and Smokefur tried not to move a lot. Her chest rose and fell multiple times, but she couldn't fall asleep.
"Smokefur?" Snakefang whispered.
Thankful he was up too, Smokefur purred softly. "Yeah?"
"Come." The warrior heaved himself up and nudged her up too. Smokefur followed him out of the warriors' den and into the clearing. He spoke no words, but beckoned her with his tail out of the camp. She stayed by his side, not daring to stray.
"Where are we going?" Smokefur looked up at the sky. He'd taken

her through the forest and now they entered the moor. She unsheathed her claws and sank them into the muck.
Snakefang sighed and gave no answer. He trekked through the deep mud and jumped over a stump. He hurled himself through a watery swamp, looking over his shoulder every heartbeat to make sure Smokefur was following.
Grass was barely visible. Smokefur was not sure if this was even MapleClan territory anymore. "Snakefang?" She paddled her paws through the sticky swamp water and lifted herself out onto a dry platform. She shook out her fur and looked at him.
A sigh came from him. "I found this tunnel," Snakefang started, but trailed off. "Curiosity." He finished. The whole story told by one word. He crossed through a ditch and over a thick, fallen tree. They were following the line between the forest and the moor.
"A tunnel?" Smokefur echoed, following him uphill. He led up to a roaring sound. She was not able to put it into her mind until she saw it. The Thunderpath?
The thick, black path went side to side. A monster turned the corner and began racing up towards them. As it passed, a loud, endless noise blasted with it.
Smokefur shot back down with her tail between her legs. Her ears pinned against her head as she looked back at Snakefang who was beginning to cross the Thunderpath.
A shadow flashed across her sight. It made her pelt crawl and fur on high ends. "He's doing this for you, Smokefur."
She twirled around to see Adderstrike at her side. His big shape loomed shadows over hers.
"Watch closely." He purred, pressing her back up the hill to the Thunderpath. "This is my son. Snakefang is the best son any father could ask for." Adderstrike made sure Smokefur was watching, pressing his head against hers to guide her vision.
Snakefang hurdled onto the black path. Lights flashed. A monster turned the corner and zoomed down at her mate.
"Snakefang!!" Smokefur yowled, trying to move, but Adderstrike's claws dug into her pelt, pulling her back. "Snakefang, move! Watch out-"
A cry of shock yowled from Snakefang as his blood shot out and splattered across the Thunderpath.

Chapter 27

Smokefur felt Adderstrike's apparition disappear and her pelt shook free. She raced up the path and huddled over Snakefang's body. "No, no, no, no..." Smokefur licked at his neck as a monster rushed down the other side of the path.
Her heart sank. "Come on, Snakefang." Smokefur's heartbeat began to quicken. "Don't die on me!" She bent down and grabbed his scruff, shaking violently. "Come on! It's n-not funny.." She sniffled and pulled him onto the other side. Her eyes tearing as they went back onto the other side of the path where they came from.
A few more monsters flashed by, and Smokefur cursed at every one of them for stealing her mate. "I wanted to have kits..." She cried in barely a whisper. "I wanted to have a life with you..." Her words were swept away by the big, lumbering animals on the path.
The sun began to rise, starting from the undergrowth, then lifting into the sky. Smokefur laid in Snakefang's dead paws for the whole night and morning. She cried all night, mourning her mate and her loss. But she was grateful no cat was there to watch.
Chattering came from a group of cats. The dawn border patrol. Smokefur assumed. Now she would have to stop tearing up. To let the rest of her sobbing out, Smokefur yowled painfully.
Quickly, the patrol turned and raced towards her and Snakefang's dead body. Luckily, Sandheart was in the patrol.
"Smokefur?!" She meowed in delight.
They must have been looking for me... Smokefur's lifted head fell back under Snakefang's chin as she started to tear up again.
Sandheart, Halfwind, Patchpaw, and Blackfoot stood horrified over their Clanmate's body. All of their eyes were on Snakefang.
Patchpaw was uneasy at first. He flinched and backed away with a hanging head. To Smokefur's surprise, Blackfoot began to cry in disparity.
"W-What happened, Smokefur?" Halfwind tried not to panic, but failed. Her eyes were nothing but painful slits of black.
Smokefur let her eyes close. Earlier she made Snakefang's paw wrap around her. It stood still even now as if trying to protect her. "H-He went on the Th-Thunderpath...and-" She sniffled and cuffed her paw

over her ears and let it slide over her eyes.
"A monster hit him?" Sandheart shed a few tears, but she wasn't close with him like Blackfoot and Smokefur. She had no problem saying it.
Snakefang's paw moved down to her waist as she shrugged her shoulders. "Yes-" Smokefur told them as she breathed in heavily and sadly.
"I'm so sorry." Sandheart padded around and helped Smokefur out of Snakefang's grasp. His paw flopped onto the ground like a dead minnow.
Smokefur turned her head away and bent her neck against Sandheart's side. "H-He just went so fast," She lied. "He ran out...I tried to stop him, but he froze in the middle of the path...a monster turned and...and-"
"It's okay, you don't have to explain." Sandheart soothed her sad temper, but could not fix her broken heart.
Halfwind turned to speak with Blackfoot. They would carry him back to camp, the deputy ordered. The warrior didn't argue.
Patchpaw stood off to the side of the patrol. "Snakefang is dead?" He mewed in question.
"Yes, Patchpaw." Sandheart answered softly. "He hunts with StarClan now." She purred lightly.
His dad is with the Dark Forest...what makes you think he will join StarClan? Won't they reject him because of his father in the place of no stars?
They entered camp and cats came out of their dens right away after smelling the death scent. Halfwind rushed into Onestar's den after placing Snakefang at the center of the clearing where Smokefur sat over him for hours. But the leader already came out of her den. No meeting was needed, all cats of MapleClan already came out of their dens.
Silverclaw came out. Her eyes wide with shock. "My baby!" She yowled and skidded to a halt at the end of Snakefang's tail. "What did you do?!" She growled at Smokefur.
The warrior looked up. The fight must have been worse than I thought... Smokefur stared up at the almost-elder that she had attacked a moon ago. "Me?" She echoed in disbelief.
"You foxhearted sapskull!" Silverclaw growled and launched herself at Smokefur. Her claws unsheathed as she shredded at her grey fur. Unexpected of this attack, Smokefur knew she could not battle an

elder. "It wasn't me!" She pushed the harmless cat off of her and licked her shoulder fur down.
"Then who?" The elder loomed over Smokefur as if she were a little kit. "Who killed my son?!" She yowled in her face.
"A monster! On the Thunderpath!" Smokefur laid down on her back underneath the grey-furred feline.
Silverclaw pushed her muzzle against Smokefur's, less than a half a whisker away. "I don't believe you." She whispered. Her foul breath stung in Smokefur's nose.
"Get off of her." Halfwind trotted out of Onestar's den and into the clearing. Her fur was bristling, but no emotion showed in her clouded eyes.
Onestar followed on her tail, but the leader skirted up the Highrock as the deputy stopped at the edge of the clearing. "All cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather here beneath the Highrock for a Clan meeting." She yowled.
Cats began streaming out of their dens. Cherryfeather came out of the warriors' den with Blackfoot at her side. Silverclaw trudged after them, heaps of mud overwhelmed her long, unsheathed claws. Crookedwing took Losteye's side as the elder flanked his friend to the middle of the clearing.
Halfwind stepped forward. "I'm sorry to all, but I have no chance of becoming your leader anymore. My whiskers seem to be turning grey," -purrs of amusement whispered across the camp.- "And I suppose MapleClan would have a better chance without me if I joined the elders. I will be here for moons to come, but until my vigil, I shall stay amongst the nests of Crookedwing and Losteye."
No wonder she's been acting weird, she's old! Smokefur chuckled to herself as she heard the elders purring loudly.
Onestar nodded as her old deputy stepped back and turned into the crowd. Crookedwing pressed his muzzle against hers. Losteye was looking the other way, blind-sighted. "Well it's about time we got ourselves a she-cat in our den, eh, Crookedwing?" The old tortoiseshell cat meowed loudly with his tail at Halfwind.
Smokefur laughed. She could help herself. Blind cats never knew where they were going, nor who they were talking to. Did he even know it was Halfwind?
"Smokefur," Sandheart trotted up in front of her. She crossed through the cat-crowd and purred as she pushed up against her. "Come on, I need to talk to you privately." Sandheart's eyes were

not worried, nor was her tone.
The cream warrior turned and led out into the moor. Her paws clacked against the mud, as well as Smokefur's. She stopped at a sandy point. It was way off the trail to the Thunderpath...where Snakefang died, Smokefur bowed her head. But Sandheart's squeal made her look up.
"What's so great that you have to be so loud?" Smokefur jerked her head back to reality and zoomed away from the thought of her mate's blood spilling across the Thunderpath. She blinked and stares at her friend.
"I'm going to have kits, Smokefur!" Sandheart mewed delightfully.
"Firebreeze's?" It was obvious.
"Yes!" The cream queen purred so loudly it almost made an echo.
Smokefur leaned in. "Have you told him yet?" She asked. No warrior wouldn't want to know he was going to have his own kits.
"Not yet," Sandheart's eyes glowed like rays of sunlight. "But I plan to do it soon, though!"
"Congratulations." Smokefur meowed and touched her friend's chest with her tail affectionately.
Sandheart rubbed her head against her neck, but flicked her tail wearily as they both noticed a rustle behind the marshes. "Do you hear that?" Sandheart asked with narrowing eyes.
"Yes," Smokefur growled at the shaking marsh. Sandheart was really noticeable by the stomach now that she knew. Her ears pinned back when it stopped. A dark shape moved slowly now in the hollow area and slipped out into the open.
Fur ruffled, Smokefur snarled at the huge, long-furred animal. It growled back at her. It was bigger, probably stronger too, she realized as it pounded forward and Smokefur pulled Sandheart back out of the way.
"Watch out!" The cream queen yowled as the animal's un- sheathed paw swiped at her face.
Smokefur knocked off balance and Sandheart leapt onto its neck. She dug her powerful jaws into the animal's scruff and pulled, shaking violently. Smokefur looked up and blinked.
Dazed, Smokefur darted underneath and shot out from under its jaw, slicing her claws at its muzzle and nose. She drew blood and growled, batting her unsheathed paws at his face to pull herself up. As she did, a cry of shock came from her friend on the animals hind. Sandheart clenched her teeth on his whipping tail before she

hit the ground. Smokefur's eyes turned to slit's as it swung its tail back and forth, flingin the queen from side to side.
"Sandheart!" Smokefur hissed from on the huge beasts scruff.
"It's a wolf! It won't stop until it knows we won't either!" Her friend told her in response. Sandheart had her claws ripping into its tail skin, but she was quietly crying for help.
Smokefur growled in her throat and turned to his face again. Her claws dug into his fur to keep hold of the twisting, turning creature called a 'wolf'. "Out!" Smokefur yowled into the sky, as she reared up. Hardly a heartbeat passed before she brought her claws down onto the wolves eyes.
Terror shrieked from the huge gray beast and its tail stuck under its legs and howled into the sky with pain clouding around its scent. The wolf squirmed out of their grasp and Sandheart was flung off as it turned and raced away into ArrowClan territory.
Smokefur mewed in triumph. They beat a fox on their own! The elders will someday tell this story! She turned and walked up to her friend and purred. "Did you see him?"
Sandheart was silent.
Again, Smokefur stepped closer and looked over her friend's shoulder. "Sandheart?" She looked closer over and saw blood running from the queen's neck. Her eyes went to slits.
Sandheart flinched, giving Smokefur hope at last. She quickly clenched her teeth over the queen's scruff and began to pull back home. Her eyes watered as she carried Sandheart through the mud and past the moors.
As she entered MapleClan camp, Smokefur could barely see over the blur of tears. She was too fearful Sandheart might die on her.
"Honeywhisker! Cardinalpaw!" Smokefur yowled in a loud beg for help
The medicine cat rushed out of her den and into the clearing where Sandheart's body lay. Her apprentice stayed back, waiting for an order of herbs to rush at him.
"She is with kits!" was Honeywhisker's first words. She mewed them loudly and proud. "Cardinalpaw, bring me borage leaves, comfrey root, cobwebs, and juniper berries! Now!"
The apprentice snapped and reacted quickly. He darted into the medicine den and came out two heartbeats later with all of the herbs Honeywhisker had asked for. Cardinalpaw dropped them by her side and gazed down to watch how it's done.

Firebreeze came out of his den with wide eyes. "Sandheart?" He growled when he saw Smokefur and started after her.
Smokefur backed up as he yowled in dismay. "Are you serious right now?" She hissed and smacked his face with her unsheathed paw and knocked him off balance. "All cats who think I killed her join Firebreeze for a 'everyone-don't-trust-Smokefur' group!"
Another snarl washed over her as Silverclaw stepped back from Sandheart to be pressed beside Firebreeze's flank. It wasn't her fault every cat died when she was around!
"You attacked me when you became a traitor-fleeing back to CloudClan. You killed my son, Snakefang, after moonhigh so no one would catch you." Silverclaw spat with narrowed eyes as if expecting everyone to believe her. She lied, "Now you killed Sandheart, your own denmate! Who's next?" Silverclaw thrust her muzzle into the grey cat's face.
Smokefur gasped at the lies. Has this greying cat lost her mind? "If I did kill anyone-which I didn't-my first choice would be you!" She launched herself at the elder and grasped her teeth onto her shoulder.
In surprise, Silverclaw yowled in pain and unsheathed her claws to slash at Smokefur's face. She swiped her paws over Smokefur's ears and ripped it open, splattering blood over her fur.
Smokefur whipped around and kicked out her hind legs as she reared up and gripped down square on the elder's shoulders. She bit down on her scruff and shook raggedly as the cat squirmed underneath her. Silverclaw twisted and matched her face to face. She flipped over and didn't notice at first that her underbelly had been exposed. Quickly, Smokefur slashed at the pink space and drew blood right away. Her claws ripped through the skin as she growled in fury.
"Enough!" Honeywhisker busted through the pelting storm of cats. She obviously knew none of them would ever dare to attack a medicine cat.
Silverclaw bowed her head, but Smokefur lifted her chin high, feeling the pleasure of winning.
"Smokefur," Onestar padded forward, startling Smokefur from behind. "You are truly gifted with your power of strength, but you must learn to be obedient to your Clan and save your strength for when we need it."
Before she could reply, she leader jumped up to the Highrock. "All

cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather here beneath the Highrock for a Clan meeting." She addressed formally.
All the MapleClan cats looked up at her. Everyone had already exited their dens. Smokefur looked up at Onestar, her mind racing for an excuse for her not to be angry.
"As you know, our most loyal warrior, Smokefur, has been tossed between both CloudClan, and MapleClan." Onestar mewed and looked down awkwardly, "So, I offer this warrior her chance to choose."
Gasps burst out from around the crowd.
Smokefur was confused. Why had the leader asked this now? Couldn't it be dealt with at the next meeting? The grey she-cat came forward and looked back at the crowd. "I vow my life to this Clan. I couldn't be any more proud to be a MapleClan cat. If I had to choose, no doubt my answer will always be MapleClan."
The leader dipped her head in happy respect for her choosing. "Sandheart and Snakefang's vigil will be after the gathering. Speaking of, I would like all my senior warriors to meet me in my den to discuss who will be going tonight." She wrapped it up and turned to slip back into her den.
The gathering! Smokefur had completely forgotten, but she also haven't forgotten Sandheart would not be able to go with her...
"I'm so sorry for your loss." A voice made her turn.
"Cardinalpaw," Smokefur blinked in surprise, "Er...its okay. Im not worried about her anymore..." But her kits, I am. She finished in her head.
The medicine cat apprentice nodded. "Come," Cardinalpaw looked worried as he led to the medicine den. "We need to speak privately." She followed. "What's the matter?" Smokefur tilted her head to the side and followed him into Honeywhsiker's den.
"Honeywhisker told me she has had an omen sent to her last night by StarClan," Cardinalpaw started, sighing, "She told me this would happen..." He added to himself, but Smokefur heard. The apprentice paused for a few heartbeats. "StarClan has made it possible for us to deliver Sandheart's kits." He mewed.
Smokefur's eyes widened. "Really? Where are they?" She sniffed and scented the faint scent of her friend.
"With no queens in the nursery," Cardinalpaw continued, "You are the closest thing we have." His breath quickened. Smokefur could almost hear his sides heaving. "Smokefur, would you like kits of

your own?"
"I do!" She bounced to her paws with shining. "I'll move to the nursery. I'll raise the kits as my own!"
Cardinalpaw purred, "You must have small amounts of borage leaves each day to increase your amount of milk." He advised and glanced over his shoulder back at the medicine cats' nests. "They are resting."
At the thought of having her own kits, Smokefur felt joy fizz in her paws. "Can I go and see them?" She meowed happily, flicking her tail back and forth impatiently.
"Of course," The medicine cat apprentice purred some more and led the way into his den.
Two kits wrapped in cozy layers of moss laid in the den. They smelled like Honeywhsiker's foul breath, but it was faded, and she didn't care.
One was a beautiful cream colour with dazzling blue eyes, just like her mother. The other was a tabby-like red with darker stripes and green eyes that dazzled like Smokefur's. She purred.
"I love them."

Chapter 28

The next sunhigh had come quickly. Cardinalpaw told her she was free to take the kits to the nursery with her when she was ready, and he toms her not to take too long. The apprentice seemed happy to help Smokefur in her motherhood. She was glad he was.
Smokefur trotted quietly across the clearing and approached Onestar's den. She told herself she was ready...she knew she was. Her fur felt pricked, but when she turned to lap it down, it already was. She felt like ants had crawled into her nest and crawled all over her now.
The leader mewed her greeting as Smokefur peeked into den. "Permission to enter?" She whispered through the hanging reeds.
"Permission granted." Onestar narrowed her eyes and laid down in her nest, waiting for the new queen to speak.
Smokefur was grateful for her patience, because she felt cautious and hesitant about Sandheart's kits. "I would like to ask permission to mother Sandheart's kits," She whispered as she walked through the reeds and sat in front of the leader. "Without any other cat knowing, except for Firebreeze...he'll want his kits to know him as their father."
The leader was taken aback. "Do you think Firebreeze was trying to hurt you yesterday?" She asked, scanning the warrior-queen.
Surprised, Smokefur wondered to herself. Was he? Cats should love their mate always, and Firebreeze showed courage in attacking Smokefur to try and venge her death. "No," Smokefur decided.
"Do you regret what you did yesterday?" Onestar continued with her questioning. She seemed restless. Why didn't she take a nap instead of asking useless questions to a loyal warrior who wants to be a queen?
With a shrug, Smokefur actually thought to herself. Was I being harsh? Did I offend anyone? "I do not regret bringing Sandheart back to camp, but I regret fighting with Silverclaw. I know I'm not exactly on her good side..."
"You are quite the warrior, Smokefur. You have a big heart. Yes, you may mother Sandheart's kits." Onestar purred as her narrowed, suspicious look in her eyes dropped from sight.

"Thank you!" Smokefur bounced to her paws and watched with loving eyes as the leader flicked her tail at the exit.
A dip of her head was not far from a goodbye. "Now go get someone to help build your nest in the nursery, their naming ceremony can be hosted when you've chosen their names." She meowed and got up out of her laying position to duck out of the den.
Smokefur followed quickly behind, and headed for the medicine cat den to get her kits.
"By the way," the leader called over her shoulder, "I need to know your plan, the one you told me when you first arrived. But it can wait." She leapt up to the top of her den.
"All cats old enough to catch their own prey, gather here beneath the Highrock for a Clan meeting." Onestar sat on the Highrock and curled her tail over her paws neatly.
Cardinalpaw met her inside. He was fussing over Smokefur's daily borage leaves. Scooping up the pack, Cardinalpaw turned to her and purred. "They are playing around in my nest. I matted it down so they could play fight." He reported as Smokefur disappeared into the place he had shown her earlier.
Gazing in, the cream kit had her tiny claws stuck in her brother's tail and she chewed on it playfully. The Tom spun around and butted her on the head gently. He's fur was softly ruffled as the two slowly battled against each other.
Smokefur purred and looked down at them. Her green gaze would not shift anywhere else. She loved them with all of her heart.
"Would you like me to help you bring them to the nursery?" Cardinalpaw suggested, fixed on her affectionate eyes.
As she nodded, Smokefur could still not lift her eyes from them. They were now all she had. "Yes," She meowed, the loving tenderness in her voice sounded as if she was a real mother. "I want to name them before moonhigh though." Smokefur added.
Cardinalpaw nodded respectfully and nudged himself towards the kits. "They are probably hungry," He told her, picking up the Tom in his herb-scented jaws.
"Yes," Smokefur had no other answers to give him. "I just...I love them so much..."
The apprentice purred and lifted Firebreeze's kit out Ito the clearing and across into the nursery. Smokefur followed behind. The scent of Sandheart made her tear up, but she knew it was for he best for her

friend's kits.
Firebreeze burst out of the warriors' den with question flooding his eyes. Smokefur guessed he was wondering who had caused the scent of Sandheart to spill, and she knew he had to find out his kits were alive at last.
"What is this?" The red warrior demanded, stopping his trot pace beside Cardinalpaw. He sniffed the red kit and his eyes widened with amazement. "They're alive?" Firebreeze croaked, shocked.
"Yes, and Smokefur will mother them." Cardinalpaw mewed and added to the warrior. He met his gaze steadily without another remark as feirceness shadowed his eyes. Smokefur assumed he was secretly telling him it were for the better.
Firebreeze hesitated at first. He was clearly unsure that he wanted Smokefur to mother them, but if that was the only way for them to live, he had to agree and move with it. "She has milk?" He asked with a glance at the grey warrior-queen.
"I do," Smokefur replied before the medicine cat apprentice, "Cardinalpaw has been giving me borage leaves since...since Sandheart died. They are strong and healthy." She reported with sass in her tone. Smokefur knew she had to get along with the warrior in order to not have a war in her own Clan. She smiled at him for the peace.
In exchange, Firebreeze dipped his head and smiled back.
Cardinalpaw set the red Tom-kit down on a nest inside the nursery.
"Where did this come from?" Smokefur sniffed it to make sure nothing bad was going to disturb her or her kits.
"I made it for you,"
Smokefur looked over her shoulder at Patchpaw in the slight hole of a doorway. She purred at his presence. "Thank you, Patchpaw." She mewed and wrapped her tail around her kits.
The she-kit gazed up at Smokefur with the same dazzling blue eyes as her true mother. Her paws shuffled as she ducked down and began to suckle. As for her brother, he dived in and didn't bother to see the loving care in their new mother's eyes.
"She will be named after her true mother, Sandkit." Smokefur whispered and tried keep her voice down. She looked up at Firebreeze. "Do you wish to name him, as his father?"
The red warrior purred, "Of course," He stopped to think for a moment.
Smokefur lapped Sandkit in the head and let the warmth enter her.

She nuzzled her Tom's forehead, too.
"He shall be named Redkit." Firebreeze mewed and gazed at his new kits, fret filled his eyes as he glanced up at Smokefur, not Sandheart.
"Redkit," Smokefur echoed, "What a lovely name for a Tom." She added quietly. "Sandkit and Redkit."

Barely a moon passed and the news of the two new kits spread like wildfire across the camp. Redkit was half a whisker taller than Sandkit, but they'd both grown so much.
The kits had been welcomed to the Clan as true MapleClan members, and Firebreeze accepted Smokefur as their mother. She knew he was growing attached to the kits, and her.
As Redkit hurtled himself at Sandkit, the she-kit squealed in surprise. The two tumbled to the side and rolled over, clinging to each other's fur like burrs at the size of rabbits.
Sandkit launched herself forward, knocking Redkit off balance. She stood with triumph at first, but then dived in to pin her brother down. "Got you!" The cream she-kit mewed.
"In your dreams!" Redkit lifted himself off the dust and flung at his sister with playful fury gathering in his hard, ice blue eyes. He bowled into her. Sandkit purred as he scuffed her over the ear.
From the nursery, Smokefur sat down beside Firebreeze. Her flank pressed up against his. "They can't ever know their mother..." she whispered with sorrow, "Maybe when they're older, though."
"I know," Firebreeze sighed and stared blankly into the clearing where Redkit and Sandkit fought against each other. "At least they know me." He blinked gratefully at Smokefur for her help.
Smokefur watched Honeywhisker enter camp. She was carrying large beech leaves which carried other herbs inside. The medicine cat had gone out for two sunhighs looking for the right herbs to be ready for leafbare.
Cardinalpaw met him outside her den with a purr and she signalled him inside with a flick of her tail. The apprentice followed her obediently.
"I hope Honeywhisker brought back some borage leaves," Smokefur said quietly, "I've been low on milk lately."
Just then, Cardinalpaw emerged from the den and was carrying the normal pack of borage he always did to her. "Here you go," He nudged the pack towards her, "Honeywhisker found it near the

abandoned twoleg nest on the far side of ArrowClan territory. She said it was growing more fresh than she had ever seen!" Cardinalpaw purred.
"Perfect," Smokefur dug in and chewed its' leaves until it was mush. She swallowed and took another bite of the flower. "How is she?" She asked through a mouthful of leaves.
"Doing fine," Cardinalpaw mewed hesitantly, "I just think...er...I think she's getting too old to go on journeys like that." He told them and looked over his shoulder at the yowling medicine cat. She was scorning Blackfoot for bringing her a maggot-filled blackbird, Smokefur could tell because the bird lay by her paws, drowning in white bugs.
Firebreeze tilted his head to the side. "She's fine." He meowed with a purr as he glanced back at his kits to make sure they were alright. They were a whole moon old now, and Smokefur didn't fuss about their safety anymore. But Firebreeze still did. He fretted all the time about them.
"So," Smokefur gazed at the red warrior in hopes he went to the gathering last night. "How was the gathering like?" She asked, looking over at her kits too.
The warrior shook his head, "Not well," he replied, "The leaders had to be warned once by StarClan to not shed each other. They almost covered the moon all the way before bristled fur went down."
Smokefur was surprised. "Really? What happened?" She fastened her eyes on him and listened carefully.
Sandkit bounced over before he could reply, "Redkit is being mean!" She wined and pressed herself against Smokefur's flank.
Her clumsy brother rammed into his father's giant paws. "That's such a lie!" Redkit growled.
The cream she-kit straightened up when she saw Smokefur's careful gaze. "She-cats don't lie," she replied a whisker away from his muzzle, "She-cats are less of liars than mousebrained Toms!" Sandkit mewed.
Redkit batted her muzzle with a sheathed paw. "Yeah right," he scoffed, "You just want mama on your side because she's a strong she-cat and you're not!" Redkit taunted.
"I'm way stronger than you!" Sandkit bowled her brother over and giggled when he swiped his paw over her ear.
Firebreeze smiled, but went on, "Sunstar said she was planning an attack on MapleClan,"

Sunstar?
"Has Skystar died already?" Smokefur asked, twisting her face up, "She was still alive two moons ago when I was kidnapped."
"Yeah, apparently," He meowed, "They announced the new deputy to be some cat named Lionstripe." Firebreeze stopped and sneezed. He sighed and pulled back. "He was bigger than the last time I'd seen him in a patrol. But anyway, Sunstar said we should be expecting an attack from them."
Smokefur's fur pricked with irritation. "How dare she?" She hissed, "At a gathering? What a cat." She could help thinking of Willowpaw. Or was she even still a 'paw? Smokefur shook her head and shooed away the thought. "What else happened?"
"Oh yeah," Firebreeze's arms tensed, "Willowstorm told me her Clan has given up the chase for you, but have not forgotten about it." He let his eyes narrow into Smokefur's.
"Willowstorm?" She repeated softly to herself. She wasn't a 'paw anymore! But a wave of grief washed over her. Now they'd never get to be warriors together, especially not after the gathering now. And with the attack they were planning. "My sister is Willowstorm." Smokefur retorted regretfully.
Firebreeze was not surprised. "I know," he dipped his head. "But I think she still wants you back; she kept asking me about you for some reason."
"Of course she did, but my heart lays with MapleClan and I'll never forget what Onestar has given me after my Clanmates almost let Willowstorm die in front of my paws." Smokefur released at last. The grudge for the stupid CloudClan fogbrains was finally told to someone.
The red warrior opened his eyes in surprise. "Is that why you came to our territory?" He asked conversationally, "Explains why Onestar accepted you so easily. I could never reject any cat in need of help." Firebreeze purred and lapped at his chest.
I'm still seeking my revenge, Smokefur whispered in her head as the conversation slowed. And I will get it. I'll get it good.

Chapter 29

A sudden breeze shifted the trees. A swift kick in the leg made Redkit howl in pain. Sandkit stood up after being shaken off balance from her practice move. "That was good," the she-kit tried to sound like a real mentor, "But this time try to stay on your paws."
The red Tom-kit's sides heaved. "C-Can't we do some else?" He blinked, still unbalanced and staggering to the side. "I'm dizzy and I can't help but fall down when you kick my paws." Redkit sighed loudly.
"Can't you just do it one more time?" Sandkit pressed her nose against her brother's flank and helped him up. She purred and touched her tail against his chest. She earlier started observing the way family members greeted each other and how they treated each other. Firebreeze began doing that to Smokefur just a few sunhighs after they were born.
Smokefur noticed Onestar staring at her and her kits sometimes. She wondered why, and if there was something wrong. The queen got to her paws and looked back, "Firebreeze, keep an eye on them." She called, "I'm going to see Onestar."
As she entered the den, Smokefur watched the leader spring to her paws.
"Hello!" She purred, forcing herself to sit back down. "You're just the cat I wanted to see." Onestar gestured her to sit down as she laid on her nest.
Her paws tucked under her body as she found herself in the same position as Onestar. "I'd like to talk to you too." She meowed, the visions of her old plans coming to reality placed reigns of glory hanging over her head.
Onestar stared for a moment, but wasted no time. Smokefur could tell she was thinking. "When you first came to the Clan," She started, "I knew something was odd. I thought something bad would happen if I let you in..."
As the words trailed off, Smokefur narrowed her eyes. "We're you scared of it?" She thought Omestar might have been having the same dreams as her. If she did, why didn't she say anything before?
"Honeywhisker said she had a dream about you and your

prophecy." The leader shook her head as if regretting every word she said. "She told me Cardinalpaw had it too, and I didn't want anything bad to happen to my Clan." Onestar's eyes shone with pain. She dared not to hide it. She fearfully continued, "I knew if it was the way of StarClan, I had to go with it."
Smokefur was confused. Had she caused pain for the whole Clan? Was Onestar not proud of what she has done for the Clan? "Excuse my misunderstandings, but I...er...I've been having dreams too." She thought of the pain the leader might be going through.
"Why haven't you told Honeywhisker?" Onestar didn't sound angry or upset, only desperate eyes gave off a pleading effect. "She's going to the Moonstone at clawmoon with Cardinalpaw to speak with StarClan with the other medicine cats, you know. She could ask for you."
"I don't want to cause trouble, I don't think it really means anything." But I do know I still want my revenge against CloudClan and their foolish ways!
Onestar tilted her head to the side. "Are you sure?"
Smokefur sighed. She couldn't get the image of Snakefang out of her mind now that they were talking about dreams. The young warrior raced out onto the Thunderpath for no reason; how could Adderstrike be a father to such a loving cat? And how does Snakefang's fate change hers?
"I'm sure, Onestar." Smokefur mewed, closing her eyes.
The leader dipped her head respectfully to the queen. "Also, with these new kits in the nursery, I'd like there to be an attack party on CloudClan before they attack us.
Blinking in surprise, Smokefur looked up.
"What's your plan?" Onestar seemed determined.
The queen narrowed her eyes and smirked. "The strongest warriors only," she looked at Onestar when the leader asked who. "The first party will be Blackfoot, Snowstream, and Owlstone, with Halfwind as the lead. The next will be Foxlight, Tigerfrost, and Silverclaw with you as the lead?" Smokefur suggested when she ran out of names.
"Yes, of course. Who shall protect the camp if none of our warriors are here, though?" Onestar was worried now. Moonlight already began to spill into her den, and Smokefur guessed she wanted the first party to leave at moonhigh.
But, Smokefur shared her worry. "They would still be

outnumbered," She reported, "My kits are four moons old already, and Sandkit shot Redkit in the leg this morning with her own made up move." She purred with joy and proudness of her kits. "Overall, I'm not worried. The CloudClan cats would be so terrified they'll run away before we get our claws on them."
"I know that," Onestar's whiskers twitched with amusement, "But what if Willowstorm and a smaller patrol come over and leave their camp with ours unguarded?" The leader fretted.
"I'm not a queen, I'm a mother." Smokefur's words seemed to startle the leader, but she continued, "I'm still a warrior at heart."
Onestar bowed. "And I accept you as one of my cats. I'm so thankful you choose us over CloudClan. Those fogbrains can never get over themselves."
With a chuckle, Smokefur dipped her head. "Besides, no CloudClan cat knows I'm a mother yet, so they'll attack me and get the beating of their life. Trust me, Onestar, I know exactly how to do this."

Stars began to sprinkle the sky as the half-moon entered the sky. The first party gathered at the entrance. Onestar had already made it clear that they were to attack any CloudClan cat in their way. With Halfwind at the lead, and Blackfoot, Snowstream, and Owlstone at the deputy's sides, there was no doubt MapleClan would leave a large dent in their plan.
Darker the sky grew, Onestar paced back and fourth. Her tail swayed behind her nervously. But as the moon reached the highest point in the sky, the leader sent the first patrol off into the forest part of their territory.
Smokefur smirked at the edge of the nursery. Sandkit sat seriously beside her, mimicking her expression. Otherwise, Redkit was trampling behind them on their flicking tails. "That are you looking at?" The red kit asked, attacking Sandkit's tail playfully.
"We're watching the attack patrol," Sandkit replied sternly, as Smokefur would have if she hadn't have beat her to it. "Come sit. The second patrol is about to leave!"
Another group of cats streamed down the slope into the forest, passing the sticky moor. Smokefur watched as Onestar gathered the second patrol. The medicine cat came over to her and Smokefur lifted her ears forward to hear. They were nearly a fox-length away.
"Are you sure you want to do this and risk your second life?" Honeywhisker mewed uncertainly. The medicine cat was sitting on

a dry patch and leaning in towards the leader. "Then you'll only have one left!"
Smokefur sensed something off about Honeywhisker. She was expressing her worry, not yowling at her not to go. It was different, something Smokefur was not used to. "Sandkit, bring Redkit inside the nursery. I'm going to speak with Onestar." She touched noses with her kits and watched as they fled into the nursery, rolling over each other.
The leader and medicine cat both looked at her as she padded over to join them. "I'd like to go, instead of Firebreeze." Smokefur mewed, looking over her shoulder at her den cautiously.
"What?" Onestar narrowed her eyes. "You can't do that, you're a queen. You'd only fight if our camp was attacked."
Honeywhisker nodded her agreement.
"But I have to!" Smokefur pleaded, gazing straight into the leader's eyes. "You don't understand, this is my attack. I have to go!"
Onestar stared back. "You have kits to look after. If you die, they will too." She growled, "I'm sorry, Smokefur, but you're not attending this attack. Maybe in the next fight, you will have better luck and come with us." The leader swung her head around and flicked her tail so the second party gathered around her. "We're going now, Honeywhisker. We'll be back before dawn." She trotted out.
The queen bared her teeth. "I'll fight for you, and fight against you. Either way, I will always put myself through the most pain before anyone else." Smokefur hissed to herself, lashing her tail impatiently.
"Mama! Redkit bit me!"
Smokefur turned around to Sandkit approaching her quickly. Her eyes were filled with hurt. "He did? Are you hurt?" She licked her kit's head.
Honeywhisker purred and sniffed at her leg. "You taught him that, silly. Next time you won't teach him to be so violent!" The medicine cat rubbed her nose against the cream kit's neck.
Sandkit rolled her eyes and looked up at Smokefur with pleading eyes.
"What do you want me to do about it?" Smokefur purred in amusement.
"He should be punished, in my opinion."
Dark thinking for a kit, Smokefur heard her old, own words repeat

in her head. She remembered the last time she said that. Had she given off a bad influence on the kits? "Don't you dare speak anything of it," Smokefur growled sternly, looking into Sandkit's eyes. "That's a horrible thing to say."
Sandkit was taken aback, obviously. She opened one eye wider than the other, confused. "Sorry, mama." Sandkit mewed.

Silverpelt began to fade and the sun's light began to shine through the trees already. The air was frosty and cold. A layer of morning dew laid across the moorlands.
The cream kit bowled her brother over and he let out a squeal. They had been playing all night as Smokefur paced back and forth, awaiting her Clanmates' return.
The queen narrowed her eyes at the entrance as a scuffling sound started up. She felt a flutter of hope I'm her chest as Onestar appeared from behind a tree, her pelt was slightly scratched, but not bad.
"They fled," The leader reported as countless cats came out from behind her back. Halfwind was bleeding deeply from her flank. Smokefur looked for her kits' father. Firebreeze was spotted from the back of the crowd. He was breathing heavily, bleeding from his ears to his paws.
Filled with worry, Smokefur darted over to him and pressed up against his flank. His head was bleeding badly, red running down his face. Firebreeze sighed and looked up at her. "I-I'm fine..." He rasped.
Smokefur scanned him closely. "Come to Honeywhisker's den with me, you need it." She ordered, driving him to the medicine den.
"No," The warrior refused stubbornly, "The Clan comes first...plus, Foxlight had more wounds than me." Firebreeze insisted, turning away from her and towards the warriors' den.
Purring, Smokefur flicked her tail. "You would make a great leader," she complimented at him, "You know the warrior code by heart; you're so caring and loving."
Firebreeze looked stunned over his shoulder. "Thank you. Maybe I will be deputy once Halfwind is the leader." He purred and sat down outside the warriors' den and gazed at her. "But what about when Firestone becomes leader? There will be two Firestars."
"Firestone?" Smokefur recalled the deputy of ArrowClan. He was a huge half black, half orange Tom, loyal and true like all cats should

be to their Clan. "I don't know him, but he's a good cat."
The red warrior nodded his agreement. "Yes," He twisted his neck and lapped at the wounds shed over his shoulder. "But I wasn't attacked by him-"
"Firebreeze!" Honeywhisker made them both jump. "Your pelt! Why haven't you visited me?" She hissed, circling him and pushing her paw against his scars.
The warrior flinched. "It's not that bad..."
"It's more than bad," Honeywhisker grabbed his scruff in her jaws and pulled him out of his sitting position.
Firebreeze shook her off and sighed, "If you insist, but it's really nothing." He meowed as the medicine cat pushed him to her nest.
"I'm not in pain, is all." The warrior growled and began to trot away from her and her impatience.
Smokefur shook her head. She didn't want her kits to be afraid of the damaged warriors they will soon be...one day. "Sandkit, Redkit," she called out loud, "Come my darlings, let's play some mossball instead of sitting inside."

Chapter 30

"Get it, Redkit!" Sandkit mewed as watched her brother toss the mossball in the air. She quickly dived for it and sent it flying back towards him.
The queen sat patiently by, waiting for the hunting patrol to come back. They were due soon. Meanwhile, Smokefur watched her kits playing the game she'd taught them about a moon ago. The days had been sunny, even though leafbare was soon.
Sunlight filtered through the trees overhead as Redkit reached for the mossball one last time. The kit bounced up and smacked it with one paw. Then, he was caught off balance and fell onto his side. Redkit meowed loudly and rolled over onto his back. Smokefur watched Sandkit bound over to him and lift him up gently. Her whiskers twitched in amusement.
Suddenly, Foxlight, Tigerfrost, and Halfwind raced into camp with blood drooling off their pelts. CloudClan scent was matted on their fur as the scent wafted the camp.
The deputy was at the lead, yowling orders, "Blackfoot, Foxlight! You guard the nursery. Tigerfrost, Silverclaw! You guard the elders' den. Everyone else, wait for my command to attack!" Halfwind growled loudly.
The Warriors obeyed and rushed to their stations. All the others, Snowstream, Cherryfeather, Firebreeze, and Owlstone, poured out of their nests and formed a line a fox-length away from the entrance where they expected CloudClan cats to break in any second. Otherwise, Patchpaw, Skypaw, and Cloudpaw scrambled quickly into the line as well. Cloudpaw was growling, Skypaw hissing, and Patchpaw snarling at the front of them with every muscle in his body tense.
Smokefur was pushed into the nursery by Blackfoot as Foxlight nudged her kits into the nursery. "Come on, little ones. Go inside..." The warrior mewed softly.
"Get away from them!" Smokefur growled. At this point, with CloudClan cats streaming into the camp, the queen knew she couldn't trust anyone. Not even her own Clanmates. What if they were secretly working for her old Clan and wanting revenge for

something? Smokefur wrapped her tail around her kits and pulled them back, licking their heads calmingly.
Her kits mewled in fear. Sandkit gazed up scaredly at her mother. "What's happening, mama?" The cream kit asked with growing eyes. Smokefur began to tear up. "Stay close and I promise no one will hurt you..." She lapped her again comfortingly.
Redkit didn't bother to talk. He winced and tucked his head in Smokefur's stomach. Not long after, Sandkit did the same. Smokefur felt her kits' pain and fear run within her as she smelled in the scent of her own Clan, CloudClan, and blood.
Cats scrambled over each other outside. Smokefur's eyes turned to slits as she spotted a familiar warrior; Lionstripe. The tall, broad-shouldered tabby snarled as he brought himself down onto Blackfoot. The MapleClan cat screeched and hauled himself up, clinging onto Lionstripe's fur like a burr with his sharp claws.
Foxlight carried on alone guarding the nursery. She hissed as another CloudClan cat charged for her. At first, Smokefur didn't recognize her, but the name came by in a flash...Willowstorm!
The pale warrior opened her jaws in a harsh snarl as she came down on the MapleClan warrior after rearing up. Her long claws sunk into Foxlight's shoulders and she dug her fangs into her lower neck. Foxlight hissed and twirled around under her, kicking up with her hind legs underneath. Willowstorm squealed in surprise and backed up, only to have Tigerfrost pounce on her back. The MapleClan cat's eyes filled with hate as he unsheathed his claws and pulled them down her ribs. In response, Willowstorm screeched and darted towards Smokefur, her eyes blazing with hatred.
The queen got up right away and hissed. "Get away from my kits!!" She growled as her sister bowled into her chest. Smokefur unsheathed her claws and backed into Redkit and Sandkit, push them back.
Willowstorm hissed back at her. "Make me!" She yowled and pressed forward, thrusting her muzzle into Smokefur's. Her long claws unsheathed as she held her glare steadily into the reflecting emerald eyes.
Without a thought, Smokefur pushed herself forward and grabbed onto Willowstorm with her claws. "Stay away from my kits or you'll be crowfood." She threatened, puffing out her chest. Smokefur forced her claws into her sister's ribs where Tigerfrost had made his mark.

"I'll kill them!" The pale warrior yowled and thrust her body over Smokefur towards her kits.
Fangs felt heavy as Smokefur sank them into her sister's scruff, pulling her back. She whipped around and saw another CloudClan cat stalking towards her kits. She didn't recognize him at all, but he came on quickly. Again, Smokefur pulled back and Willowstorm flew back. She leapt at the other cat and was instantly whipped off. As the CloudClan cat turned, Smokefur noticed Pinepaw right away. She must be a warrior, her shoulders were thick and she was bigger than ever. The CloudClan warrior snarled and snapped around, hitting Smokefur on the head with her giant paw.
Shocked, Smokefur cried out for her kits, then crashed onto the nursery floor.

The queen blinked herself awake. She couldn't see where she was. Her eyes were somehow sewn shut. No pain ran her by until the cries of her kits ran in her ears. "Redkit! Sandkit!" Smokefur yowled into the air.
"Hush, hush..." A calming voice meowed softly, "Everything will be alright."
Smokefur knew she was in the medicine cats' den right away. Honeywhisker's touch and scent wafted her nose.
"Redkit has gone!" Sandkit breathed heavily and pushed her muzzle into her mother's scruff. Her body was pushed up against her in fear. "He wasn't strong enough to make it through the thick bramble wall with me...and he disappeared!"
The grey queen's eyes burst open. "What?! My precious Tom-kit!" Smokefur cried, then turned to Honeywhisker and growled.
The medicine cat dipped her head. "I think you need to rest, Smokefur." Honeywhisker bowed to her apprentice that was holding a beech leaf poultice. "I've given you poppyseeds and they should kick in any time now." She meowed to Smokefur.
"Is my mama gonna be okay, Honeywhisker?" Sandkit looked up at the medicine cat and her apprentice with her round, dazzling blue eyes.
"Yes, Sandkit. But your mother must rest now." Honeywhisker replied gently.
"Firebreeze!" Smokefur jolted her head up at the thought of the name. The warrior would be so devastated to hear the news of one of his kits missing because she couldn't take care of him. He'd never

forgive her!
The red warrior was spotted in the clearing by Sandkit. "He's over there," she pointed with her muzzle at her father.
Worried, Smokefur sighed. "I need to speak with him before anything else happens-"
"No," Cardinalpaw mewed and touched his muzzle against hers, "You need to get some sleep. We will tell him on our own."
Honeywhisker nodded and sat down, folding her tail over her paws. "I promise it will be okay," She rasped gently, "Cardinalpaw and I will let him know without panic, and hold no trouble for you." The medicine cat nodded to her apprentice.
Cardinalpaw dipped his head in return, then took a quick glance at Smokefur. Her face was painted with worry. "Sorry," He mouthed and turned out into the clearing.
The queen bent down to touch noses after feeling flushed with tiredness. "I trust Cardinalpaw," Smokefur whispered to her cream she-kit, leaving out Honeywhisker's name. She didn't quite understand the way the medicine cat acted, therefore Smokefur knew she mustn't be fully trusted. "He will take care of everything." She watched Sandkit hang her head and lowered hers to doze into the mossy, herb-scented nest.
Smokefur awoke in the same mossy bed. But no scents or sounds came from anywhere. The air was cold and the trees acted like shadows, not frost-slowing filters. The queen shivered, not knowing whether to get up, or to go back to sleep. Hesitation caught her off guard and she instantly tipped over.
Her kits both ran into the medicine cats' den. Smokefur had a look of great joy on her face at the sight of her not-dead son. "Redkit!" She cried loudly.
Her cry made her lift her head from the nest in Honeywhisker's den. It was quiet and still, and Smokefur could hear nothing but herself twitching and fumbling around in the moss. She blinked, startled. Looking around, she saw the two medicine cats in the corner of the den. Honeywhisker was speaking formally and sternly to her apprentice.
"Try again," The old medicine cat scorned, but continued more peacefully, "Do you promise to cherish and uphold the gift of becoming a full medicine cat of MapleClan?" Honeywhisker was glaring into his eyes as if mind-controlling him to do what she told him.

Cardinalpaw nodded his head and grumbled. "I do," The medicine cat apprentice looked back into her eyes, "My Clan will come first at all causes; I promise I will always try my best, heal the sick, tend to the wounded, and never turn a cat down no matter what size, colour, gender, or anything else."
He's going to become a medicine cat! Smokefur cheered in her head. She knew he was definitely trying his best and very hard. A pain in her head snapped her back to reality. She cleared her throat loudly.
The medicine cats turned. "Smokefur! You're awake," Cardinalpaw mewed happily and bound over to her. One of Honeywhisker's stares made him stop and begin to tiptoe. Smokefur didn't understand.
"Yes, I am," The queen looked over her shoulder andbegan to tremble herself back to the real forest and not her dream woodland. "Did you find Redkit yet?" She asked nervously, making her eyes dart back and fourth across the clearing.
Firebreeze was sitting at the entrance. His front paws covered something underneath his underbelly. Smokefur tilted her head and tried pushing herself up, but the pain on her head pulled her down.
"Firebreeze!" Honeywhisker glared at him worriedly and trotted across the clearing. She met him and began to share words with the warrior, and soon they came back to Smokefur. It seemed Firebreeze had a small leaf bundle in his mouth. Otherwise, the medicine cat's eyes glittered with happiness as she came back. "He has him!" Honeywhisker meowed in a rasping purr, "Firebreeze has Redkit!"

Chapter 31

"Redkit!" Smokefur cried out loud, forcing herself up from the soft moss. She limped over to her kit, helpless. Tears of relief dripped down her face. "Where were you? I was so worried!"
Firebreeze hung his head, but held his gaze shakily. "I pulled him out of the nursery after Pinetuft knocked you out," He told her, "I gave her quite the beating after I saw her hit you." He purred to change the subject.
Smokefur growled and lashed her tail aggressively. "Pinetuft? That little-"
"But it's okay because I'm safe," Redkit mewed interruptingly, gazing up at his identical-furred father. "Firebreeze rescued me." He added in a whisper.
Smokefur dropped her anger. She didn't want it to wear off on him too, like it has on Sandkit. What if he wasn't there to save you, though? "I'm so very glad he did," Smokefur meowed gratefully, looking up at the kits' father. "They probably would have stolen you without his help..." She trailed off in thought.
Tying his tail around his paws, Firebreeze sighed. "Maybe, but who really knows?" He suggested mildly.
Smokefur was offended, especially with him knowing about CloudClan trying to get her back. Of course they would try to steal her kits instead of her; what a better revenge than her altogether. Smokefur decided not to say anything in front of her kits. "Only StarClan can know something like that." and cats with brains! She added in her head hostilely with a growl.
Sandkit jumped out of the Honeywhisker's den with a leaf of herbs in her mouth. She dropped them immediately at the sight of her brother. "Redkit!" She meowed loudly, "You're alive!" The cream kit rushed over her kin and touched noses with him gently.
Redkit purred without a response. He obviously didn't want to speak of Smokefur's growling. "I am," Redkit pressed his muzzle into his sister's chest lovingly. "And you are too!" He chuckled.
Responseless, Sandkit seemed to look up at Smokefur, gazing directly at her weak point of sadness. The cream kit turned around towards her Clan-born mother, but did not remove her eyes. They

sparkled like tiny diamonds, just as her real mother's once did. Heartbeats passed in silence and Sandkit did not move. Some- thing told Smokefur she was waiting for her to make the first move.
"That's great," The queen meowed awkwardly, hitting the Tom at her side to speak up.
"I'll ask Honeywhisker to have a look at me later," Firebreeze growled, rolling his eyes and looking over at the medicine den.
"No!" Smokefur hissed impatiently, giving a loud huff. "Do you mind going to fetch some fresh kill for the kits?" She suggest- ed, nosing him into the clearing.
The warrior grumbled his opinion and set off.
Sandkit cuffed her brother over the head. "You mousebrain!" She growled, "You scared me so much! I thought you were gone forever." The cream kit pushed against her brother and Smokefur let out a sigh of appreciation. She had felt the same way about her sister. The queen felt an urge to never let these kits fall apart like she and her kin had done.
"I wouldn't ever leave you," The smaller kit replied, shaking out his long red fur. "You're the best sister a Tom could ask for."
Smokefur reflected. She couldn't help it now, but think of Willowstorm. The only-kit of Coalstorm. Could it be? Has the pale warrior forgotten she even had a sister?
Another warrior came into her mind as Firebreeze dropped a finch on the floor between his paws and began plucking out it's feathers. Smokefur narrowed her eyes on the fresh kill and noticed to herself she hadn't eaten since the last sunhigh. "Watch the kits," She meowed and went to duck out of the nursery, "I'm going to get some fresh kill for myself." The queen lashed her tail and slipped into the clearing, squinting in the sunlight.
The scent of CloudClan still reeked in the camp, but Smokefur had gotten used to it already. Her heart lurched when a CloudClan body was laid out in the clearing. Another ducked her head over his body. Two MapleClan warrior stood at their sides.
"What's this?" Onestar padded out of her den with an angry face. She glared at the queen, then turned to the cats of another Clan.
"What you're doing here interests me a lot," Onestar gave a harsh snarl, "Why are you here?"
Smokefur sat up as Hollywish looked up. Her face was painted ill and sad. "You killed him!" She yowled at the leader.
"Show some respect!" hissed Foxlight who was at the old queen's

side. The MapleClan warrior slashed her claws at her face. "She's your leader now."
Onestar dipped her head in acknowledgement of the warrior's honorable gesture. "You are to respect, and follow the warrior code now that you're a prisoner of MapleClan."
Prisoner? Smokefur narrowed her eyes and quickly headed over to the fresh kill pile, grabbing a vole in her jaws tightly. She kept her eyes glued to the 'prisoner' and hoped she would attack. This was the Hollywish. The cat she had wanted to kill since she lived in the wretched CloudClan. "Banish her," The queen snarled as she came closer to the leader and warriors, "She's no use to us." She switched her gaze from evilly at Hollywish, to persuadingly at the leader.
Onestar was clearly ready to shoot back a growl, but she would never show her Clanmates fighting in front of another Clan. Weak cats were the only spot attackers went foor. "She will just go running back to her tiny-membered Clan." She meowed.
Hollywish shed another tear, but refused to g down without a fight. "We'll launch another attack until you Clan is gone!"
"Shut up!" Foxbriar interrupted and whipped her with fully unsheathed claws once again.
Onestar blinked gratefully at her loyal warrior, but hushed her with a flick of her tail. "MapleClan is strong, especially with our queen, Smokefur, raising her kits to become apprentices soon, we will be stronger than you ever were." The leader threatened, eager to win.
The CloudClan warrior bowed her head and Smokefur felt her win and held it in her heart proudly. Her kits would be the finest warriors in all of Clan history, and she knew it.
"I promise to avenge your death, Lionstripe, my love..." The black CloudClan warrior mewed deeply, pushing into her mate's neck lovingly.

The day passed quickly then. After the CloudClan warrior's defeat, Hollywish sat vigil with her mate for a very long time. Smokefur made an effort to approach her once, but a loud, harsh snarl told her to stay away. So, she did so until all the cats of her Clan were sound asleep in their dens. She snuck out of the nursery and into the clearing.
After quietly padded over to the black warrior, Smokefur made a short note to herself about Hollywish's rising chest. She growled lowly and less harmful than before just to wake her.

Hollywish lifted her head and was about to snarl when Smokefur bowed her head and silently mourned the death of her mate. "I'm sorry about Lionstripe," She started peacefully.
"How would you know?" The warrior spat, "You're just a fox-hearted sapface to me. You've never had a mate. You don't know the pain of dealing with death and accusations. You're nothing but crowfood to me, and you know it."
The heartless words stabbed through Smokefur like thorns and she was instantly reminded of Snakefang, her long lost mate who supposedly killed himself for her on the Thunderpath. "We used to be really close," Smokefur added through her insults, "And yes, I did have a mate. But he died on the Thunderpath..."
Her words obviously softened the CloudClan warrior. She was less harsh-hearted towards her now. "You...you did? Hollywish's voice turned into a low whisper of sorrow. They had both lost their mates now, and Hollywish had something to trust her about.
"I am fox-hearted," Smokefur lied, huffing in her mind. "I miss my old Clan, and I felt so bad about offending and accusing you of everything."
Hollywish looked up, crickets chirping quietly in the distance. She sighed, "But thats the thing..." She mewed, hardly a whisper now, "I did do everything that you said I did."
Smokefur jerked her head back. "Are...are you serious?"
"Yes," Hollywish confessed solemnly, "My kits are Bluesong's, not Lionstripe's. I used Lionstripe as a replacement for my caring, love-struck mate. He loved me so much. Then you started accusing me of things and I had to find a way to get Willowstorm on my side."
Smokefur hissed, ducking down her head, but her gaze glued firmly onto Hollywish's. "Willowstorm is so much better! She would never do that-"
"There's more," The warrior interrupted, blinking awkwardly. She didn't seem aggressive or wanting any violence. "I told Bluesong I couldn't be his mate before he died so I could tell Lionstripe they were his kits. Of course, the old deputy wouldn't just go off and kill himself because his mate broke up with him..." Hollywish smirked at her paws and shuffled them uncomfortably.
The queen ruffled her fur, not processing the information very well. "You killed Bluesong?!" Smokefur's eyes shot open widely.
Hollywish looked up, hostility shining like Silverpelt in her eyes. "Then I actually fell in love with Lionstripe..."

Smokefur let out a harsh hiss of disbelief. "All along," She whispered to herself, "I knew I was right!" She leapt to her paws and stared down at the warrior angrily. "Lionstripe died because of my Clan because of you?!" The queen snarled.
The CloudClan warrior bowed her head, ready for the wrath of pain that was about to break upon her head. "He died at my paws."
Hollywish spat in a force of annoy against the queen in front of her. She ducked her head into her old mate's scruff.
She'll pick off every MapleClan cat as soon as she gets her paws on them, Smokefur's eyes turned to slits as she thought to herself, I have to...I have to kill her...or she'll kill me and my whole adopted-Clan!
Hollywish was clearly taken aback by Smokefur's unsheathed claws. She moved back and her eyes turned to slits. "You're going to make me pay for it, aren't you?" The warrior couldn't take her eyes off Smokefur's long claws.
Lacking a reply, Smokefur gave a simple nod and watched green flames burst out in her eyes. She smirked unwillingly, letting a growl rumble loudly in her throat.
With moonlight sparkling over her pelt, Hollywish looked up, horrified.
Smokefur puffed out her chest and felt swelling inside her. Could she actually kill a cat? At once, she whipped her claws at Hollywish's fur and shredded through her skin. Thrilled, Smokefur sneered and bent over.
To her surprise, Hollywish launched back. Her claws unsheathed, but they were hardly the size of Smokefur's. The warrior growled and jumped over the queen, bowling her over the dusty floor.
The queen rolled herself to the side and reared up, smashing her paws onto the warrior's shoulders to pin her down. Her claws dug into her fur, drawing blood unbelievably fast.
Shuddering with fear, Hollywish snarled widely. "I will come back!" She yowled, causing MapleClan cats to come out of their dens.
Halfwind instantly shot out from the warriors' den hissing and spitting. "Smokefur! Hollywish!"
Onestar silenced her with her tail and watched interestedly as Smokefur pressed her other claws against the prisoner's neck.
"Hush, my deputy. This must only be settled by the cats within."
"B-But Onestar, she's going to kill her-"
"Shut it!" Smokefur snapped and the green flames overwhelmed her.

She sank her claws into the warrior's neck, somewhat enjoying the blood that splattered up her claws.
Hollywish squeaked in pain as red ooze drizzled down her neck.
Her slitted eyes closed and her chest began to rise and fall more slowly until it stopped.
Smokefur lifted her head and yowled ear-piercingly.

Chapter 32

The moonhigh after, Smokefur awoke in a dream. The clearing was dark and the forest was messy with leaves; she guessed it was the beginning of leaf-fall. As trees hovered over her and she padded along the path, Smokefur noticed the horrible stench poisoning the air.
A dark figure raced passed her vision like a flash, darting amongst the gloomy trees and area. The feline's tail flicked back and forth. Coming forward, Smokefur recognized the cat she had killed the moonhigh before; Hollywish.
"You were bold to kill me," The former CloudClan warrior growled. Smokefur narrowed her eyes and gulped back a threat. "You would have killed my real family in MapleClan if I didn't," She hissed, sitting down and wrapping her tail over her paws. "And I'm pretty sure Onestar would have had your ears and your tail off anyways."
A loud snarl came from the she-cat, but she did not respond. Smokefur smiled at her winning. "Do you know where you are?" Hollywish growled.
With a sigh, Smokefur shook her head. The place where she was now was unlike any forest she'd ever seen. It was dark, damp, and unusually muddy. The winds made her fur ruffle, not only by the stench, but the blast of cold billows that rammed into her sides.
The former CloudClan cat smirked, but still said nothing. Instead, she turned and slowly padded off with Smokefur left to follow. Of course, she didn't want to follow, but she also didn't want to get lost in this creepy forest.
"You're quite lucky to be able to come here, Smokeskull." meowed a distant voice. It wasn't familiar to her, but she could smell the rusty scent of CloudClan on her pelt.
Another cat peered out of the loom. His yellow eyes shining like the sun. "She's more than welcome to stay," He rasped with a horrible cough.
At once, a familiar cat pushed his way to the front of the crowding cats. His scent was his own, not belonging to any of the Clans...all except his former; PondClan. It was Adderstrike!
Smokefur suddenly felt a pang of fear enter her pelt. Where was

she? Adderstrike slunk back, his sleek pelt showed his ribs as he darted amongst the other cats. "My name is Smokefur," She shivered at the glowing eyes as a Tom came out and stood in front of her. His muscular blue fur reflected the undying moonlight. He sat down beside Hollywish and in front of Smokefur. "You are with the Dark Forest now," The Tom meowed to Hollywish into her ear, "And we are always grateful to be able to accept another cat to our kind."
Backing up, Smokefur felt terrified. "W-Why am I here? I should go to StarClan! I've thanked them for every piece of fresh kill I've ever eaten!" She cried.
A bulky feline growled when the queen backed into her. "Who is this, Thornclaw?" She muttered to the blue Tom.
"Dinner." Thornclaw replied, lapping his tongue across his lips. "The new Dark Forest cat, Hollywish, brought her back from the forest for us." He stomped forward, but the bulky she-cat pushed him hard backwards.
"I asked who this is!" The she-cat yowled at him.
At once, Thornclaw shrunk back in his place. "She claims to be called Smokefur."
Hollywish glared disobediently at the big she-cat. But with a whip of her big paw, the former CloudClan cat was knocked off balance and disappeared into the darkness.
"This is my old form and she will be treated with the exact same respect you have for me," The she-cat hissed at the Tom and the other cats behind him, "Is that understood?"
The cats behind Thornclaw nodded briefly and darted away. However, the Tom did not. "It is understood, Smokeskull."
Smokeskull? "My name is Smokefur!" The queen growled up at her 'future self' who was standing over her. "And I'm not a kit, I can take care of myself, thank you very much." Smokefur pulled herself from out under the badger-like feline.
"I'll be watching you," was all Smokeskull said when Smokefur growled at her. "You will soon be called after me and the forest will hate you for it." She hissed with an evil laugh.
The loud chuckle echoed in Smokefur's ears and she bent down to stop the voice. But it continued until her head jerked up to her nest in MapleClan. Sighing with relief, she looked around the warriors' den. Wait-the warriors' den? Smokefur had just realized she was missing her kits. Where had they gone?
The queen padded across the clearing into the nursery. "Sandkit?

Redkit?" She meowed calmly, as if just dismissing the reality of her being in the Dark Forest. Could it be?
No, Smokefur decided, it was just a dream...
She searched the dens; the nursery, the elders', the medicine cats', and the warriors'. No kit was found. Panic began to rise in her rest as Smokefur rushed back over to the medicine cats' den.
"Cardinalpaw?" She whispered and slowly came closer to his nest.
"Smokefur?" The medicine cat apprentice mewed and looked up at her with a crooked look. "What are you doing here?" Then, he was taken aback. Cardinalpaw stood up and backed away as if scared of her.
"Yes, it's me. Where are my kits?" Smokefur asked, determined to find her kits at once.
Honeywhisker lifted her head from beside him. "Get back to your nest," She growled.
"My kits. Where are they?" The queen hissed back at the medicine cats.
The two looked at each other before Cardinalpaw bowed his head in misery. Honeywhisker did the same. She finally turned her eyes to meet Smokefur's after a few silent heartbeats. "Smokefur...you kits...they're dead."
Shocked, Smokefur stammered in thoughts. All of her feelings and emotion had gone down in a deep hole, never to come out. "What do you mean, they're dead?" The queen hissed
"Firebreeze was devastated as well..." Cardinalpaw mewed sadly, probably recalling the horrified father's face. He was the only thing they had, and he was the only thing they had. Now the kits were gone...but how?
Smokefur pressed herself forward. "Who killed them?" She hissed hostilely, as if accusing them of killing her kits.
"Sunstar, Pinetuft, and Crowfur came into our camp." Cardinalpaw mewed, "While the leaders were talking, Pinetuft snuck off and got her claws on a few warriors."
"And my kits..." Smokefur finished with a sigh.

The sunhighs that passed felt like heavy weight on her shoulders. "A queen without kits ought to live in the warriors' den with the rest of us!" Blackfoot had growled the day before.
Since then, Smokefur stayed in the warriors' den and slept in her kitless nest. The warmth of their birth-mother, Sandheart, had gone

first, now it was her kits. "What's next?" The warrior-queen murmured and looked from her paws to the sky.
It was dark and the stars were shimmering brightly overhead. The grey she-cat gazed into the lovely Silverpelt and wondered where her kits would be. Had she taught them right? Did they go to StarClan?
Of course they didn't! Snapped a voice in the back of Smokefur's head. They're safe in the Dark Forest...with me...
The warrior-queen's ears pinned back as Smokeskull's voice repeated in constant echoes. She shook the voice out of her head and stalked off to the warriors' den to sleep. It seemed that's what she really needed now. She felt like she hadn't slept for moons now that her kits were gone.

Chapter 33

Dark horizons hovered over the she-cat's head as she watched Silverpelt fade into black billows. The days went on with nothing. With no kits, Smokefur knew nothing was okay with her mind. She sometimes pictured Blackfoot and Foxlight with their own kits. They'd be so happy...
She chipped off her thoughts at a blur of a shadow at the end of the clearing. The warrior-queen tilted her head to the side and narrowed her eyes.
The cat at the edge stared back at her with no sound. At once, the feline turned the corner and disappeared into the darkness. The she-cat spent not a heartbeat on pacing herself, but got up quickly and raced after it. She peered into the trees, fumbling her paws as the cat jumped out and glared at her. Smokefur was uncomfortably wincing away, but felt deeply intrigued by the scent of the mysterious feline.
"Who are you?" The other cat rasped before Smokefur could do anything about them on her territory.
The grey she-cat had to shake her head to get the evilly staring yellow eyes out of her mind. They were familiar to her. "Smokefur, and you? What are you doing here?" She began to hiss lowly.
"Oh, Smokefur, it's just you." The Tom responded with a flick of his long black tail, "Good thing too, because I'm here to take you somewhere. I didnt want to go into your camp because of my scent, but luckily you saw me."
Smokefur felt like she was going to explode with unexpecting anger. "What is your name?"
"My name is Thornclaw. I met you the other night," The Tom growled and smiled at her heavy-shouldered reaction.
Her rage broke into worry. "I'm guessing Smokeskull sent you?"
"Yes," Thornclaw meowed, glancing over his shoulder uneasily.
This Smokeskull must be very powerful if she has control over the whole Dark Forest! Smokefur's eyes turned to slits in anger. Was it possible she killed her kits? "She hates you as much as I do," The grey she-cat hissed without thought, "And I follow her. The word of Smokeskull is law, and you out of everyone should know that."

Thornclaw bowed his head defeatedly.
As for Smokefur, she felt power pouring into her soul. But at the same time, it seemed that StarClan was fading away. "Why has she sent you?"
"Smokeskull says she has a link for you and you must follow it to another Clan." The Dark Forest warrior replied and kept his head hanging low at his paws.
Smokefur dipped her head in respect for his honor towards her. This was her time to shine now that her kits were gone. Did it matter anymore that Willowstorm was alive? She hated Smokefur now. Did it matter that Snakefang was dead? He died for her and still would if he was here. But he wasn't. Did it really matter that she was in privileged contact with the Dark Forest? Clearly StarClan abandoned her when they took her kits!
"I'll do it," Smokefur decided out loud, "I'll do it for the Dark Forest."

A half a moon passed before Thornclaw returned. But this time, he had been sent to tell her; "The trees are moist and the grass is damp. The sounds are howling and the cats are growing."
Smokefur guessed it was a tip towards the Clan she had to move on to. What did it mean? The only other Clans in the forest was PondClan and ArrowClan. PondClan was sunny and dry, but the cats were always 'howling' at others and each other. Although they were nice after you got to know them, they were very mean if not. Otherwise, ArrowClan had all sleek cats and weird scents. They had part of the sticky moors at the border of MapleClan, and wind was always howling there. The cats were very protective; growling at every living thing that was not allowed on their territory.
During this debate, Smokefur was analyzing every detail of the other Clans to see which one was her next place to call her temporary home. Trees are moist, grass is damp, wind will howl, cats will growl-the only reasonable Clan is ArrowClan, so that's where she'd go.
But what about the Clan here? What would she tell Onestar? Oh right, her plan! She could tell the leader she was going to the other Clan to make them strong and for the allegiance between them, then they can attack PondClan and CloudClan without fear!
Smokefur lifted her head from her nest and looked particularly at Halfwind. The deputy was her mentor, so she must trust her. But the leader must be told first. The warrior-queen pushed herself up

and slipped across the clearing. The moon was just beginning to heighten in the sky. It's silver rays pooled across the grass as the grey feline crawled into the leader's den. Smokefur purred her greeting and Onestar lifted her head.
"Greetings, Smokefur." The leader mewed with a warm gaze, "You're feeling better?"
"Yes, thank you for asking." Smokefur had a low growl itching in her voice. She just wanted to leave; she didn't have anything here anymore.
Onestar dipped her head. "Why are you here?"
"I have to leave," Smokefur mewed quickly to seem like she didn't want to leave. "It's not you, it's me. I just feel like I have nothing left to live for here."
The leader was clearly taken aback. "So you're just going to run back to your old weak Clan?" Onestar stood up with every hair on her pelt bristling. "I will not let you go back to them. Do you hear me, Smokefur? I have risked every one of my warriors to keep you in my Clan and you're going to leave now? I don't think so-"
"I'm going to ArrowClan." Smokefur meowed loudly to stop the leader's fussing. "CloudClan is filled with a bunch of useless whiskers, why would I go there?"
Onestar stopped. Stunned. "Leaving us is the wrong path, my young warrior," She started again, calmly this time. "You musn't. You couldn't. You wouldn't...would you?" She gazed from her paws to meet Smokefur's eyes.
Now she felt bad about leaving, but the voice in the back of her head urged her onwards. "I've had a dream from StarClan." She lied, it was really the Dark Forest. "I will let them guide my paws no matter what."
Onestar held her look steadily. "They did?" She murmured disbelievingly. "Well I will not stand in your way, if so."
A flood of relief washed over the grey feline. "Thank you for your compassion and understanding, Onestar."
The leader had held a goodbye ceremony for Smokefur. All the cats were deeply affected. But Smokefur held solid. Her will with the Dark Forest was too strong to be broken now.
As the cats of MapleClan shared their last words and farewells, Smokefur turned towards the exit and sighed when she spotted Thornclaw at the front of the moors. His yellow eyes were drowning in emotion at the sight of the loving cats with Smokefur.

Patchpaw bounced up and bowled her over. "You're not really going to leave us, as you?" His beautiful blue eyes big and round pleadingly.
"I'm sorry, Patchpaw...I have to leave. It is StarClan's will." Smokefur meowed goodbye. She unexpectedly turned and touched noses with Firebreeze.
"Goodbye," The red warrior was crying, to Smokefur's surprise. "You cared for my kits, you were there for me since Sandheart died, you are an inspiration to us all." His nose left hers and he backed up to stand in front of the crowd.
Smokefur was struck with shock. Did Firebreeze love her?
"Goodbye. Firebreeze." She moved up and touched his nose once before she turned towards Thornclaw and disappeared to them into the moors. Smokefur met the Dark Forest warrior on her way out. The emotion that was hanging over him was gone and it seemed to leave from her too.
"Let's go. You can lead. You have to get used to it if-" Thornclaw trailed himself off and bowed his head. He followed Smokefur across the muddy lands into the forest part.
Marsh began to soak their feet as Smokefur stepped ahead and sniffed the air. "It's all clear," she told him and turned over to him. At the sight of only trees, Smokefur looked back and forth, all directions of life and nature seemed to be pointing at her. Thornclaw was gone until she returned to the Dark Forest, Smokefur knew. Without thinking, her paws automatically made her move up a path into ArrowClan territory.
Before she knew it, a hunting party of half a dozen cats stood in front of her. "Who are you and why are you here?" Growled a huge grey Tom with black paws.
"Hush, Thundercloud. Not a feline would dare to attack with you around. Plus, she's alone. It's clearly not an attack," A half black and half orange Tom nudged his Clanmate away and looked at Smokefur as if expecting her to agree.
Surprizingly, the grey she-cat recognized the ArrowClan deputy, Firestone. "As much as I'd love to tear out your whiskers, I'm only here to speak with Sorrelstar." She purred peacefully at Firestone.
Thundercloud snorted disbelievingly. "A cat from MapleClan on our territory? As if! She's probably just here for our thick stack of fresh kill."
"StarClan sent me a dream and told me to come here." Smokefur

hissed.
The black-footed warrior stepped forward threateningly.
"Why didn't you say so?" Firestone growled so his warriors would stay back. The two others that were behind him still had said nothing, but their fur was bristling as much as Thundercloud's.
"Ivythorn, Morningheart," he called.
A strong-looking grey she-cat came up at his side. On her flank was a blue-eyed tuxedo Tom. He looked very mean-like.
"Take her sides and escort her to our camp," ordered the deputy. "Let's go."

As they neared the entrance to camp, the floors became soggy underpaw and Smokefur felt uneasy. As much as she wanted to make this Clan weak and have Onestar attack them, she knew she had to make them trust her first.
Thundercloud would be a problem in her plan, therefore she knew he must be terminated. Now that Smokefur had complete proof of StarClan not on her side, the Dark Forest was the only true thing she had left.
Looking closely at Firestone, she realized he was one who trusted easily. Maybe he'd be the one to weaken his own Clan!
Slowly, Smokefur managed to get herself to fall in step with Firestone right before they entered camp. "Hey," She whispered to the deputy while looking at her paws, "Thanks for not letting them tear me to shreds." The warrior-queen added a forced chuckle.
Firestone glanced uneasily at her. "I couldn't just let you go down like that. All cats deserve the right to speak," He straightened up his neck and lashed his tail noticeably.
"Firestone!" A yowl came from the Clan's Highrock.
The deputy looked up. Smokefur copied him and gazed to see Sorrelstar glaring at them both. Thundercloud, Ivythorn, and Morningheart trudged off to their dens in a hurry.
"Who is this, and why is she here?" Sorrelstar spat, walking quickly towards them.
The deputy bowed his head. "This is Smokefur. She has spoken of a dream from StarClan to meet you." He sat down, slightly shaking of fear of his spitting leader.
Sorrelstar relaxed her shoulders and Smokefur saw Firestone ease up as well. "I see," The leader meowed, scanning the grey warrior. She didn't say anything after that. All the leader did was turn back

to her den.
Warriors, elders, queens, and kits, they all peeked out of their dens to see what was going on. Smokefur felt the same way she did when she entered MapleClan for the first time. They had not trusted her until she proved to be loyal to them and only them. She had to prove to be one of the strongest warriors to earn their respect. Thundercloud was one who did not trust easily. He'd be her Tigerfrost, the cat she'd beat to prove her strength.
"All cats of ArrowClan, gather beneath the Highrock to hear my words," Sorrelstar called out.
Smokefur turned in her place, only to be bowled over by Thundercloud. The big grey warrior hissed in her face as he passed. This is my chance! The she-cat's eyes gleamed with prideful rage. Instantly, she rammed into Thundercloud's flank, testing for his weak spot. The ArrowClan warrior spun around, fierce anger flooding his scent. He slashed his claws at her ears, but she ducked. Smokefur felt the whole Clan watching them now. Sorrelstar did nothing but watch them, just as Onestar did. Thundercloud swiped again, but missed. Smokefur dashed under him and used her size for strength. Without wasting a heartbeat, she pushed up as hard as she could. Thundercloud yowled out loudly with wide eyes and moved forward a fox length. He turned to face her and puffed out a cloud of air. "You're going to regret that, MapleClan cat."
The grey she-cat smirked as she remembered the words Tigerfrostyowled at her when she first challenged him. "I'll regret nothing, ArrowClan kit." She repeated from moons ago.
Fuelled with rage, Thundercloud let out a mighty roar and charged towards her. Smokefur was pinned down by him, and her thoughts of Tigerfrost came to life. She imagined the MapleClan warrior's face on Thundercloud and lifted up her paws to claw at his arms. The Tom gasped as blood spewed out of his fur. Smokefur's eyes turned to slits at his horrified face.
Thundercloud healed back, cursing at his thin layer of fur. Smokefur smiled at her opponent. "Come on, that was just the beginning." She mocked at him. But the warrior didn't move. He was licking his wounds now, clearly unable to fight back, even for his pride. "Fight me, kittypet!" She yowled.
"Enough!" Sorrelstar jumped down and landed in between them. "Smokefur has proven to be stronger than our strongest warrior. We cannot have her against us." The leader of ArrowClan turned to

Smokefur and sighed in disgust at her own Clan's weakness.
"Smokefur, do you accept the status of warrior of ArrowClan?"
Smokefur held her head high. "I do."
"Then forever now, you may stay in the warriors den until your days are up." Sorrelstar craned her neck to see over the crowd. "May I see all my senior warriors in my den, please?" She didn't wait for a response, but turned and disappeared in her cave-like den.
That was too easy! Smokefur smiled darkly at her paws.

Chapter 34

The warriors of ArrowClan did not fully accept her at first. She figured they were just scared of her since she had the longest claws and that she beat Thundercloud at his own fight.
Morningheart was crouched beside Ivythorn. Smokefur supposed they must be mates comparing to how close they were. She saw a few other warriors too. There was a tortoiseshell Tom with blue eyes, and a pure white Tom with an ugly scar over his left eye. To Smokefur, he was quite scary with his bad temper, but to the kits he was a complete charmer.
Over the last moon, she was lonely in ArrowClan. None of the warriors had made an effort to talk to her at all. Thundercloud and his friends tried to pick on her one day. But she yowled and fought so fiercely, they hadn't talked to her since.
Icefang, the white Tom with the scar, was with Thundercloud. They seemed like brothers with their sassy attitudes. They both disliked her, but she knew that Thundercloud hated her almost as much as she hated him. Icefang was one who bragged about everything. He was also best friends with a tortoiseshell named Patchblaze. Patchblaze was a show off, and that's all there was to him.
"ArrowClan cats are so full of themselves," Smokefur mumbled to herself out loud.
Patchblaze glared over his shoulder, but Thundercloud laughed. "Ha! As if you aren't any worse!" He sneered.
"What a rogue." Icefang agreed.
Smokefur never felt so neglected. These cats weren't anything like the other Clans. With a sigh, she wrapped her tail over her laying body and tucked her face into her paws.
But a gentle poke made her look up. "Ignore them,"
"Morningheart?" Smokefur glanced up at the two cats that were hovering over her.
"No," answered a purring white she-cat.
The Tom next to her was purring too. "I'm Briarpaw," he meowed calmly, "and this is my sister, Icepaw."
Icepaw straightened her neck proudly. "They pick on everyone," she mewed with gleaming blue eyes which seemed to not be looking

directly at her. "Even us."
Briarpaw rubbed his nose against his sister's neck. "We're the kits of Sorrelstar." He told her.
Smokefur bristled. No cat would ever catch her hanging out with apprentices. "Sorrelstar and who?" She growled.
Icepaw backed up. Smokefur guessed she was frightened because of her delicate fear scent. Briarpaw stepped in front of her. "Patchblaze...we are of Sorrelstar and Patchblaze."
Looking angry, Smokefur growled in her throat again. She was amused at Icepaw's fear of her.
"You know," The white apprentice unexpectedly thrust her muzzle into Smokefur's face. "Growling at other cats is no way to make friends! No wonder every cat hates you!" She lashed her tail in frustration and turned to the clearing.
Briarpaw's eyes widened, but he followed his sister to the apprentices den where they disappeared inside without hesitation or looking back.
Taken aback was what Smokefur was now. Was it true? Was she too mean? Was she the mean one?
The thoughts hadn't stopped blasting across her mind until the moon was high in the sky. Silverpelt started showing itself above the ground. The shadows darkened and the forest was crowding with heavy fog billows. Smokefur wasn't quite used to it yet.
She couldn't stop herself from glancing uncertainly at the edge of the clearing. Thornclaw's dark pelt glimmered in the high moon's light. Smokefur hauled herself up and padded out to meet him.
"Where are you going?" Sorrelstar's voice made her spin around.
Smokefur dipped her head in acknowledgement of the ArrowClan leader's presence. "I saw something out there," She flicked her tail at Thornclaw who was sitting at the edge of her sight.
He was just before the shadows ended. Smokefur figured Sorrelstar couldn't see him, because she looked around out of the entrance and growled disbelievingly. "Okay then," She meowed, dismissing the lie she thought Smokefur was telling. "A moon ago, when you came to my Clan, you spoke of a dream StarClan sent you. They want you to speak with me?"
Smokefur's eyes gleamed with surprise. She looked back at Thornclaw. He nodded, then slowly backed into the darkness.
Smokefur watched him fade before turning back to the ArrowClan leader. "I did," She meowed and bowed her head.

"What did they tell you?" Sorrelstar seemed worried. Her heart was pounding loudly, her chest was heaving as if she'd just run a race for her life.
Smokefur sighed. She now didn't know what to say. Without thinking, she felt Thornclaw's presence near. Smokefur felt her eyes close slowly. "One cat is bold, yet another will hold. The Clan will soon mourn, and so will I; be torn." She reopened her eyes and felt her eyes droop at Sorrelstar's reaction.
The leader's jaw almost dropped out of her mouth. Her eyes were wide with worry, but she didn't say anything until a few heartbeats passed. "I just...I don't know-"
"Nothing is wrong with you," Smokefur heard Thornclaw whisper into her ear softly.
"Of course there is nothing wrong with me!" Sorrelstar snapped, "I'm the leader of the greatest Clan in the forest!"
Smokefur tilted her head to the side. Her heart ached for answers. "I didn't-"
She stopped as Thornclaw whispered again, "The smallest and weakest, you mean!"
"Shut up!" Sorrelstar yowled and pushed Smokefur over.
She fell onto her side and rolled over quickly. She got up and reared, ready for the leader to attack again. But Sorrelstar stayed put. Smokefur backed up slowly. "Listen, I'll just go to my nest. It's okay, I'll be fine...so will you."
Sorrelstar opened her eyes. They were tiny slits of yellow. She glanced up at Smokefur. Her scent was fuelled with rage. "You're not going anywhere." She hissed, "Because I'm going to tell you a secret. But first, you have to come with me."
Backing up again, Smokefur was scared now. Would the leader try at her again? "Okay," She meowed uneasily.
The leader lifted her muzzle and sniffed the air. "This way." She led, darting through the dark trees, to a tall rock-like cave. It looked much like her den, but the inside looked bigger and the way in was smaller. "Well? Go ahead." Sorrelstar flicked her tail at the inside-entrance of the cave.
Smokefur smelled in with an open mouth. The faint taste-scent was inside and she was uncertain whether she wanted to go in or not.
"Get in, kittypet!" Sorrelstar sounded angry. Smokefur had never seen any cat-especially a leader-so upset and agile. So, she slunk inside and glanced around the cave. It was dark, all except a small

outlet from a break in the hill that let moonlight dapple over the floor. Sorrelstar came in after her. "This is my private cave," Gazing at the exit, Smokefur felt heavy air crowd on her shoulders. "A private cave? Why would a leader need one of those?" She mewed and squinted into the darkest corner. There appeared to be a large nest there.

"You will never get out," rasped a feline in the nest. The scent was somewhat familiar to Smokefur. "She won't let you...she never will..."

Smokefur narrowed her eyes at the cat in the shadowed nest. "Tigerfrost? Is that you?" Then, a sharp pain hooked into her back. The grey warrior healed onto her side and pushed herself up. The cat who was on her was Sorrelstar! "What are you doing?!" She yowled, confused.

"This is my death cave." Sorrelstar hissed with an evil smile, "All cats who interfere with prophecies and my life come here to die painfully!"

The grey she-cat backed up, horrified. "It's not a prophecy! It's just a...a...uh..." Smokefur looked back at the cat in the nest. Surely it was Tigerfrost? She knew she had to help him-but help herself too?

"Run!" yowled Tigerfrost.

Smokefur turned to him. "I couldn't leave you!" She raced up to him but saw he was badly injured. His ribs were wrapped with cobwebs and one of his front paws were crushed like they'd been rolled over by a monster.

The former MapleClan warrior yowled at her to go, again. Smokefur finally came to terms with herself; he wouldn't be able to even walk away anyways. She turned, but Sorrelstar hissed in her face. She was closer to Smokefur than she'd thought!

"You stupid kittypet!" The crazy leader threw her head back in an evil howl. "I'd never let you run, and my mate, Tigerfrost, has already told you that!" Sorrelstar slashed her claws down on Smokefur's face.

A splash of blood dribbled down from a new scar over one of her eyes. Smokefur felt completely outraged. "You're not a leader, you're a coward!" She pushed up, rearing with all her might, and fell on her back onto Sorrelstar's chest. The leader cried out in pain, but Smokefur dismissed her yowling and flipped herself over. She used her back legs to claw at Sorrelstar's underbelly.

The white leader's yowl rang out once again, but in horror.

Splattering up was blood, and Smokefur finished the cold-blooded murderer with a quick but painful death blow to the neck. Her jaws clenched onto Sorrelstar's neck and she shook hard until the leader no longer budged.
Her chest heaving, Smokefur lifted her head proudly. "But if Sorrelstar was a leader, wouldn't she have had nine lives?" She whispered to herself.
"Sorrelstar was once just a warrior like you," coughed Tigerfrost, "She was called Cloudfur until her accident. The leader at the time, Hawkstar, renamed her Sorrelfur because of her bitter selfishness. However, Cloudfur hated the name. She despised Hawkstar as well, so she took his deputy's life and his before the moonhigh of his deputy." The former CloudClan warrior gulped, his eyes fluttering to a close. "And while you plotted your attack against CloudClan, I was being tortured by this...this..."
"Fox-hearted coward," Smokefur finished bitterly. She had only met the leader a moon ago, but now she saw what the innocent Sorrelstar had to offer; pain. All cats were suffering by that leader's paw and no cat had the courage to stop her. "And that's why she wanted me? Because I am strong?"
Tigerfrost's eyes closed now, his chest barely rising or falling. "Yes, Smokefur." He meowed at last after a pause in breaths. "You are strong. Very, very strong."

Chapter 35

She still wondered the day after how Sorrelstar could have been so evil towards her. How could a cat hate so much? Smokefur had rushed back to camp and told Firebreeze right away. He was the deputy after all-he had to be the only cat who knew until the time where she was now.
Looking around the clearing was hard. The unfamiliar scents still shook her and the cats still did not enjoy her company. Otherwise, Briarpaw and Icepaw still gave her a chance now and then. They didn't seem to want to give up their friendship towards her.
Smokefur sighed. Sorrelstar's death affected almost every cat in the Clan. Thundercloud insisted she had robbed Sorrelstar of her last life, but Firestone would not believe it. The deputy had sat vigil with the monstrous leader all night. Smokefur sat vigil with Tigerfrost. He was the cat to help her the most in MapleClan.
No matter how much they hated each other, Smokefur couldn't help but feel bad for his parting with life. She felt like it was her fault since his last words. How was she strong? She was nothing but a sack of flesh and bones. No cat needed her here. Maybe she'd go to PondClan. Would that be where Thornclaw had actually told her where to go? Had she taken the wrong path?
The Dark Forest warrior hadn't visited her since Sorrelstar and her had a conversation and she told her about the prophecy. Was Thornclaw upset with her? Did the Dark Forest change their minds? So many questions, but none would be answered until Thornclaw returned, or Smokefur had a dream and went back to them. But the dreams couldn't be forced, she knew. It haunted her that Smokeskull was right around the corner and could attack at any time.
That night, Smokefur laid herself in her nest and looked up at the stars. She wondered if StarClan had really abandoned her, and if she made the right choice in following the Dark Forest...would they ever forgive her if she hadn't?
"They aren't the right path for you."
Smokefur looked up at Thornclaw. "It's about time you showed up!" She growled and batted his ears.

"It's not time for that, Smokefur." Thornclaw meowed and ducked away from her swiping paws. He lashed his tail as if he were angry with her. "Smokeskull has gone! She disappeared-"
"So?" Smokefur interrupted abruptly, "Surely there is an explanation for her disappearance?"
The Dark Forest Tom pushed her over to gain control. "Smokeskull has gone, and it's time for you to leave." He hissed.
Smokefur turned at him and shook out her pelt. "Leave? I've hardly moved in!" She argued, but Thornclaw flagged his tail for her to stop. He didn't say anything but bowed his head.
"The Dark Forest is going to make you, so you don't have to worry. The world will turn under your paws and you'll leave somehow." He meowed and looked her in the eye.
She bit back her tongue and dipped her head. Somehow she was told in the back of her head not to argue with him anymore. There was no point in trying to reason with a Dark Forest cat; they always won and Smokefur knew it.
The next day, Thundercloud stood in the clearing, speaking to Icefang and Ivythorn. The two white warriors gazed up at the bulky ArrowClan cat. They nodded in agreement with something he said. Smokefur huffed. She knew the next moonhigh would be the Gathering, and some feeling told her she wouldn't be going, even if she still hadn't gone since she was an apprentice. None of her home-Clans let her go yet.
"All cats of ArrowClan, gather beneath the Highrock to hear my words." Firestone meowed from the Highrock. He stood proudly, and it was mildly noticeable to Smokefur. It was his first time to call upon the Clan from the Highrock with the post of leader.
Thundercloud turned, Icefang and Ivythorn copying him. Morningheart followed Briarpaw and Icepaw from the entrance. Smokefur guessed they had finished burying Sorrelstar, the apprentices' mother, because Icepaw was still sobbing. Briarpaw's eyes were clouded with sadness as he comforted his sister.
Firestone continued, "As you all know, I visited the Moonstone last night and I received my nine lives from StarClan." His eyes gleamed with pride. "All of you may call me Firestar now, since I am your new leader. Sorrelstar will be deeply missed by all of us."
"Firestar! Firestar! Firestar!" The ArrowClan cats cheered.
Smokefur glared and said nothing. She was anxiously wondering what he would do to her if he actually believed the truth rumour

that Thundercloud was spreading. She killed the leader in fear of all of her cats' deaths; was that not the right thing to do?
The new leader hopped down from the Highrock and touched noses with his Clanmates. All except Smokefur. She headed for the warriors' den and didn't bother to give congratulations to the new leader.
When the cats cleared, Smokefur sat outside her nest. She had previously moved it to the entrance of the den so she could watch for Thornclaw at night. Although no other cats could see him but her, it'd be easier for him to deliver messages if she was outside.
The night came over the sky in a flash. After resting in the sunny clearing all day, Smokefur felt like she was ready to go already. She had a told herself no cat wanted her there for a few sunhighs now and it finally paid off. She wanted to go.
Then, Firestar prowled quietly into the clearing from his den.
"Smokefur?" He meowed to her.
"Yes, Firestar?" Smokefur whispered, "You know you should be asleep now. You've got a big day tomorrow-"
"You told Sorrelstar you had a dream from StarClan before she died," Firestar lowered his voice and laid himself down beside her. "What really happened to her?"
Could she actually tell him the real story? Maybe this is Thornclaw trying to get me out, Smokefur wondered.
Quickly, she replied, "She...uh...Sorrelstar tried to kill me, Firestar..." She tried to hide her hate for the dead leader. How else was she suppose to explain the death of Sorrelstar to a cat that trusted easily? Would he ever forgive her? Maybe he'd banish her! Was that what Thornclaw wanted? If so, how could-
"Tried to kill you?" Firestar interrupted her thoughts, "Smokefur, the only a new warrior. Why would she want to do such a thing?"
This was her prophecy, no cat would take that away. "It happened in my dream," She dazed off into the distance to see Thornclaw mouthing everything she said as if he was making her speak the very words she spoke then. "And I killed her because that's what StarClan told me to do."
The new leader jerked his head back in disbelief. "StarClan would never send a prophecy in which cats must die! Unless it were for the whole Clan-"
"StarClan hath spoken!" Thornclaw yowled in Smokefur's voice and took her place before the leader. The grey she-cat's eyes clouded

with green fire as the Dark Forest cat took on her conversation. "You must let thy precious StarClan's will live!"
Then, Thornclaw left her and Smokefur fell to her haunches. She felt Firestar's glaring eyes glue onto her pelt. "Rise," He ordered, and Smokefur got to her paws obediently. The leader said nothing, but made the grey warrior follow as he jumped to the Highrock. She sat beneath him and frowned. "Smokefur, you have killed an honorary leader such as Sorrelstar without her will to die." Firestar roared so all of his cats could hear, "You are now, from here forth, exiled from ArrowClan territory, and you must never return." ArrowClan cats slunk out into the clearing as Firestar went on, "If any of my Clan's cats catch you disobeying this rule, they are to shred you!"
Smokefur glared at Firestar for a long moment. She could not believe her eyes. Had she really been exiled? Could it be a dream? A hard slash of claws on her flank made her spin around to Thundercloud.
"It's about time I was recognized for my truths! This cat is nothing but a useless pelt of lies." The large Tom looked over his shoulder at the nodding cats behind him. They began to cry out in moans of loss for their beloved Sorrelstar and cry out in luck for Smokefur's execution.
"Enough!" Firestar yowled and all cats hushed. "From this moment on, this rogue will be known as Smokeskull."

Chapter 36

Being executed wasn't so bad. At least not as bad as Smokeskull has thought. The name had began to suit her well. She hadn't eaten in days, making her lithe and skinny. Bones began to show through her sharp grey pelt, giving her new name something to work for. After a chorus of yowls from all of ArrowClan, Smokeskull finally left. Of course, that was half a moon ago now. It felt like seasons were passing and she still hadn't eaten at all. No effort was made to make a catch or a hunting trip. It didn't matter. Smokeskull wanted to die there and then. She wanted to go and live peacefully in the Dark Forest with Thornclaw and the other cats. They didn't seem that evil to her and that was the only place that looked like it offered somewhat of a home.
Pelting across vision was a fast, black Tom-cat. He stopped at Smokeskull's side and lowered his head to match her size. "Why so blue? You're going to be the greatest cat any of the Clans have ever known soon, and you're here glumly sulking about when there's the entire forest to be ruled over!" growled Thornclaw.
Suddenly, Smokeskull felt a pang of sadness wash over her. "But, Thornclaw, what if you have the wrong cat? What if you were suppose to find another cat named Smokefur?"
The black cat turned to her and held his gaze strongly. "I don't have the wrong cat," Thornclaw insisted, wrapping his tail around her. "I know because-"
"You must!" Smokeskull begged in a sad wail, "I can't do this...I can't! I can't! I just can't!"
Thornclaw batted her ears and wiped her muzzle with his tail tip. "It's okay, you're doing fine. You're half way there."
Smokeskull felt the Dark Forest warrior's eyes lock onto hers. Her emerald green gaze was lifted into his and glue amongst strong green flames that she could not understand or feel at all.
"The Dark Forest is so very proud of you and your ways. You have killed two cats at your own paw, and you enjoyed every second of it." Thornclaw growled into her ears.
"I did. I did enjoy it." Smokeskull hissed.
Thornclaw smirked. "You are thankful we are on your side."

"I am thankful you are on my side." Smokeskull's eyes were bursting with flames now.
"You are grateful you will be Smokeskull, the most feared in all of the forest."
"I am grateful that I will be Smokeskull, the most feared in all of the forest."

Starvation was not a problem anymore since Thornclaw spent most of his time out hunting. He said she must be well-fed and bulked up to become the new leader of the Dark Forest. Smokeskull was definitely pleased with his generosity and loyalty towards her.
They had built their dens near Fourtrees, more on PondClan's side of the territory. Midst of CloudClan and PondClan, Thornclaw told her. Smokeskull hated the scent of her first Clan staining her pelt, but she knew it would be worth it afterwards.
"You hungry?" Thornclaw meowed, throwing a vole into her den from just outside the entrance.
Smokeskull shook her head, running from her thoughts. "No, but thank you." She lowered her head and peered out into the clearing. They had found a sunny spot to rest for now. There were two thick, hollow trees that rooted from the ground, making two perfect nests for each of them. But she knew Thornclaw didn't really stay to sleep in his well-prepared nest. He disappeared off to tell the rest of the Dark Forest what was going on and what was happening so far.
"So, tell me," Thornclaw whisked his way into her den carefully. "What's your plan?"
She guessed he was referring to her thoughts. What had she been planning, anyways? "To be honest, I'm not completely sure yet." Smokeskull told the truth. There was no point in lying to a Dark Forest cat. "But I have an idea; why don't we go to PondClan? There is no other use for us in the other Clans. I've upset them all, and only PondClan remains."
Thornclaw dipped his head from what he could. Comparing to him, he could hardly fit in the small hole. Smokeskull dug up part of the floor to make some space for a dry nest instead of one viewable to the outside. "So you're going to move to PondClan?" He asked.
"Yes," Smokeskull confirmed. She was still a little bit uneasy, but other than worry and determination, she was completely emotionless. "We travel to PondClan at dawn."
Thornclaw looked over his shoulder at the sun-dappled clearing

"Can't we go now, Smokeskull? It's still bright outside and-"
"On the morrow, we go onto PondClan territory and meet one of their border patrols." Smokeskull hissed at his questioning, "I'll leave you at Tallpines and you may follow us from the shadows." She couldn't help but let out a sigh of relief when he bit back an argument. "Understood?"
"Yes, Smokeskull. I'll pack up our camp and we shall leave when ready." Thornclaw dipped his head again and backed out of her den slowly. He turned and headed off to the fresh kill pile.
Feeling like this day was the best thing that ever happened to her, Smokeskull felt a long chill of cold pride run down her spine. Never before had she felt so powerful. And to think; just seasons ago she was a helpless kit in need of some pathetic warrior's attention. Now she'd have every one of the cats' attentions. Every Clan would soon bow down to her as the ever-so powerful leader of the Dark Forest!
That night, Smokeskull was held in a piercing dream. She walked the floors of the Dark Forest and within every step, a cat bowed without needing any cat's command. Her pelt bristled like fire, and her eyes glimmered with green flames. All the power of StarClan could not defeat her now. She'd be the one to rise after they abandoned her.
She awoke to the beautiful morning sun dappling the grass in front of her nose. The fresh kill pile was no longer in the middle of the clearing and the bones she had collected were no longer beside where the fresh kill used to be. Nothing was there anymore. Thornclaw must have cleared up our camp already, Smokeskull came to a solution.
The black Tom left a plump finch on the grass for her-feathers plucked and beak pulled. It was ready to be eaten. Smokeskull was somewhat grateful, but dug in right away. No need to thank StarClan. I can thank the Dark Forest!
She jerked her head up to Thornclaw padded along the corner of his den. He had a small mouse in between his sharp fangs. Purring a greeting, the Tom sat beside her and munched on his mouse. Smokeskull narrowed her eyes. "Sometimes I wonder if you're a real Dark Forest cat." She rasped and snagged her teeth into the finch once again.
"Why do you think so?" Thornclaw gulped and took another bite from his mouse.
"You just seem so...nice." Smokeskull meowed. She didn't know if it

was a compliment to him or not, but somehow she wanted to offend him either way.
Thornclaw shot her a heartbeat time of a dirty look, then turned back to his small breakfast. "I'm different," he said at last. "I think our leader deserves the best. Otherwise, the cats of the Dark Forest voted against you, saying you were too strict."
Praying to StarClan was not Smokeskull's thing, but now her faith depended on it. Would StarClan help a cat win the Dark Forest over?
"They wouldn't and won't." answered Thornclaw as if reading her mind. "StarClan hath abandoned us all, but only those to put their lives for them win them over." He pushed his flank against hers. "For those who don't...well, they come with us; the free, and blood-hungry."
Now, Smokeskull was uncomfortable with how close he was to her. She pushed over to give him some space just as she needed. "Is there something you're not telling me?" She whispered, leaning in towards him like it was a secret only for their ears.
Thornclaw shook her away. "No," he lied. She knew by the way his eyes looked at her paws and not on her eyes. "You'll see." He added more truthfully.
Standing up, Smokeskull blinked in the open sun. Her fur unexpectedly began to bristle. She couldn't tell if he was lying or not...or did it even matter? Shaking out her soft grey pelt, Smokeskull turned at him. The thought of invading Adderstrike's home Clan was held steadily and strongly in her mind. "I'm ready."

Chapter 37

The open forest reminded her of CloudClan. The scent smelled of fresh rabbit kill and fox dung. Skies were a clear water blue, and the ground was spaced out with long, waving grass that made Smokeskull's fur bristle. The sunny weather didn't help either, the grey rogue was sweating under the full blown heat.
Thornclaw did nothing but agree with her moaning. No PondClan cats came into view for a long time until they'd almost reached camp. Border patrols and hunting patrols must've been late!
Smokeskull lifted her maw to the air and sniffed in. Her eyes turned to slots when she instantly realized they were upwind.
"Thornclaw-!"
A large feline burst out of the rack of grass and flung at her, screeching like a hungry owl. The cat's claws unsheathed and clawed down Smokeskull's face and back. It hooked it's fangs into her scruff and pulled her back. "Why are you on PondClan territory?" Without letting Smokeskull reply, the cat added, "Speak!"
"My StarClan!" growled Smokeskull, "I would answer you if you'd give me time to speak!" She glared at the feline, clearly a she-cat.
"How do I know you're not invading this territory? What's your name?" She narrowed her eyes as if suspicious of this cat's whereabouts.
The golden she-cat let out a furious hiss. "Oh, shut your muzzle! No cat believes in StarClan nowadays." She opened her mouth and revealed a sharp row of fangs in a frightening snarl. The PondClan cat spun around and beckoned Smokeskull with her tail. "I'm Squirrelmist, and you are?"
The grey rogue didn't feel as uneasy about her new name than now. Would this cat recognize the old leader of the Dark Forest and try to kill her? No. No cat would be able to kill her. "They call me Smokeskull." She answered.
"Smokeskull? Oh, Blackwhisker won't be happy to have you on his territory!" laughed Squirrelmist. She seemed to be easily misled. That's her weakness, Smokeskull confirmed.
Shaking her head, she looked past the garden of long grass. "We're almost to PondClan camp. Why haven't any patrols been out?"

Smokeskull asked the PondClan feline wonderingly.
"There'll be more since you've been spotted here!" Squirrelmist chuckled again at her own joke. "Last night at the gathering, Firestar announced you became a rogue and all Clans must watch out for you-but you don't seem that scary to me!" The golden she-cat huffed and smiled, scrunching up her nose.
Smokeskull growled in her throat. I don't have time to be talking to this mousebrain! She murmured in her head. "Take me to Fallowstar at once." She ordered.
Squirrelmist lifted a brow. "Fine," She shook her head and turned to where the PondClan scent was strongest. Smokeskull could feel the strength pulsing inside her and a rush of excitement tingled in her paws.
They reached the entrance in a flash. Her mingled Clan scents made worried glances stretch over the small crowd of cats there were in PondClan.
"Fallowstar! Blackwhisker!" Squirrelmist meowed out loud, formally introducing their leader and deputy to the new rogue in their Clan. "I bring you Smokeskull."
"The most feared in all the Clans?" hissed a voice. Smokeskull turned to a bracken-coloured Tom. He didn't look frightened, more irritated than anything else.
A long-haired, black Tom stomped out from the leader's den. His twisting yellow eyes locked hard on hers. "This cat is to be banished from PondClan-"
"Since when were you the leader, Blackwhisker?" growled a silver tabby she-cat from behind him. It was Fallowstar; the leader of the Clan Smokeskull had just entered.
Relief flooded her when Fallowstar meowed up again, "This cat will stay in PondClan until she can find a home for herself." Smokeskull couldn't help but think of the dreaded Sorrelstar who had once thrived to kill her. She took her last life after the murderous leader took the life of her not-so enemy, Tigerfrost.
"She doesn't scare me!" yowled a tiny, grey-blue kit with sharp yellow eyes and fangs that hung out of her mouth like a badger's. Smokeskull turned to look down at the kit as another came and bowled over the first one.
"Push over, Bluekit! This is my mark in warrior history! I'm gonna kill the legendary Smokeskull!" hissed the peach-coloured she-kit with deep brown eyes.

Bluekit got to her paws and sprang at the peach kit. "In your dreams, Goldenkit!" She yowled and snapped her jaws at-what appeared to be-her sister.
The peach kit yelped at the sharp maw of Bluekit at her ears. "Mama! Bluekit's being rough with me!" She cried out.
When Smokeskull licked her lips, Squirrelmist quickly bounced over. She bent down and took Goldenkit by the scruff, but held her gaze on Smokeskull. She turned then went to the nursery with her two she-kits and disappeared inside.
Fallowstar chuckled lovingly. The leader turned and focused her attention to Smokeskull once again. "Do you promise to uphold the warrior code and live the rest of your days as a PondClan cat?" She asked seriously.
Smokeskull remembered when she was asked that in ArrowClan. Sorrelstar had asked the same thing. So, she gave the same reply. "I do." She meowed in a lied vow.

Squirrelmist helped Smokeskull make her nest, even though she had told the queen she was fine on her own. The golden she-cat insisted it was the least she could do. Over all, Smokeskull enjoyed the favours and other things the cats did for her. She loved being the cat worth sharing tongues over.
Being introduced to another cat was her favorite part of it all. She met a queen named Appledawn, a white round-bellied she-cat with orange patches. This cat seemed to know every one of the elders' stories and didn't fail to mention them in every conversation.
Appledawn was expecting kits sooner than ever, and Smokeskull guessed she was most excited of all.
Bramblefang was their father, but he didn't pay much attention to the queen when he was on warrior duty. But when he was free, that Tom would be all over Appledawn.
As excited as she was, Smokeskull didn't know what Thornclaw wanted her to do there. PondClan was great; its cats, its kits, it's history...everything was going great-but what exactly did she have to do?
That night, Smokeskull waited for Thornclaw to appear out of the corner of her eye to tell her something, or to give her a hint or clue. Something that would make this journey easier on her than it was.
The Dark Forest warrior didn't come until Smokeskull fell asleep. She awoke in a dream-the forest was dimly shadowed around her.

The moon was shining bright overhead, but no stars appeared or dared to show themselves. Smokeskull growled as she was reminded of how StarClan abandoned her and took her kits. They also gave Hollywish kits when she didn't even deserve them! StarClan filled her with jealousy from the start, and now that jealousy has turned from itself into pure hatred.
A black figure darted among the trees in front of Smokeskull. She gritted her teeth and snarled into the open. It echoed for quite some time. The cat stopped and turned to her, but stayed in the shadows, eyes fixed on her. "Temptation is the way of the Dark Forest, Smokeskull." It yowled and threw it's head up laughing.
The grim chuckle faded as light sprang into her vision and Smokeskull opened her eyes to the morning in PondClan.
"Smokeskull, you're on hunting patrol!" nudged Bramblefang. His tail swayed across her nose, tickling her to wake up.
The grey she-cat glared at him, but he gently pulled her up playfully. "Come on, this is your chance to prove your loyalty to Fallowstar and Blackwhisker!" The Tom purred and bound out of the warriors' den, away from her nest.
Smokeskull stood up and stretched out her haunches. Her long claws unsheathed in front of Blackwhisker's muzzle as she reached out her forearms.
"Yes, so get going!" The deputy ordered.
Nodding, Smokeskull raced after Bramblefang as he skipped out along the unfamiliar cat-path among the tall grass. The PondClan warrior blended well beneath the blanket of ferns, even with his dark brown pelt. Smokeskull hid under a tall oak log halfway into the territory's spread of the forest.
Her green eyes fixed on a small woodland mouse. It was feasting itself on a pile of tiny seeds and herbs. She stalked forward, slowly stepping her paws on the dull earth. Her jaws opened and she plunged forward, grasping the kill with her maw over it's head and paws at it's sides.
Before it could squeal, Smokeskull bit it's neck. She sat for a heartbeat before straightening her neck. The plump woodland mouse hung limply from her jaws as she watched Blackwhisker dart towards her. The deputy had a stern face on, but he was trailing for her quickly.
"Smokeskull," The black Tom began, "You caught that?" He asked, brows lifted surprisedly. "You may take it back to camp to

Appledawn. She just had her kits." Blackwhisker told her in sort of a low growl.
The grey she-cat nodded. "Yes, Blackwhisker." She meowed in a muffle because of the mouse in her mouth. Her tail lashed as she dived into the tall grass again and towards camp. Smokeskull was excited to see Appledawn's kits, even if they reminded her of her own. She would be happy for the queen no matter what.
As she prodded into camp, Smokeskull found herself in a trot. She slowed herself and entered the nursery quietly. Dropping the mouse, she meowed, "Appledawn? It's Smokeskull. I brought you some fresh kill."
The orange-patched queen looked up. "Thank you," She whispered, wiping her tail over her kits. "Take a look." Appledawn purred softly and nuzzled a tiny patched Tom-kit. "A Tom and a she-kit."
Smokeskull purred with her. She had not felt this happiness since her kits were with her. Now they were with StarClan. "Both beautiful," She complimented, nuzzling the she-kit.
Appledawn pulled away protectively. "Sorry," She mewed gently and bent over her kits again. "I don't want them to start mewling again." The queen chuckled.
Understanding, Smokeskull made an inference. She must have been that protective too when she had hers. "It's okay, I was too."
"You were a mother?" Appledawn blurted out, surprised.
Smokeskull nodded. "A happy one," She straightened her neck when the thought of them playfully prancing around in StarClan territories came into her mind. Why couldn't they come to the Dark Forest with their foster mother? Oh right, because their real mother was probably in StarClan. That foolish mousebrain always thanked them for everything-
"I'm sorry for your loss," Appledawn stopped purring, but touched Smoeskull's chest with her tail in sorrow. "Can you help me name them?"
The grey she-cat turned her back.. "Shouldn't Bramblefang help you with that?" She looked at the queen worriedly. In her mind, she actually did want to name them. But their mother must approve and choose the cats personally in which will help with the naming of her kits'.
"You first," Smokeskull turned and laid down beside the queen. She gazed back and forth from the she-kit to the Tom-kit, wondering what Appledawn might choose.

"Maplekit," The patched queen announced.
"How does Poppykit sound?" Smokeskull decided quickly. It was a cute name, plus it suited his mother-like pelt. He did look a lot like Appledawn, but his eyes were a beautiful sky blue.
Appledawn purred. "Poppykit and Maplekit it is."

Chapter 38

Poppykit was tender and loving, while his sister Maplekit was hyper and kind. He was careful not to hurt her, even though she was always hurting him.
It reminded Smokeskull deeply about herself and her past. Her kits, Redkit and Sandkit, died two moons after they were born from an unexpected attack on MapleClan.
Smokeskull had made it her life goal, now, to get her revenge on CloudClan at all costs. If only she had an apprentice. Then she'd be able to train him or her to fight like her and have some cat who look over. If only Redkit and Sandkit were alive, Smokeskull growled in her head.
Looking over at the nursery, she wondered if she would be able to take on Poppykit or Maplekit when they were apprentices. Would she have been in PondClan long enough to take on Appledawn's birth-Clan's kits?
Blackwhisker walked out of the meddicine cat's den and into the clearing. His teeth were bared and his claws were unsheathed. He was clearly angry or upset about something.
"What's wrong?" Smokeskull asked, pretending to be worried.
The deputy passed her, then whirled around back to face her. His yellow eyes were wide as if just viciously defeating an enemy. "As if you don't know! You're the talk of the tongues!"
The talk of the tongues meant that was all the cats shared tongues about. The deputy obviously still didn't trust her.
"I'm sorry," Smokeskull dipped her head and turned away. She didn't want to discuss anything with him when he was like that, and she definitely didn't want to face him now. "Appledawn just had her kits, for StarClan sake! It's a joyous time!" She yowled into the sky, hoping he'd heard.
She slipped into the nursery and silently stalked over to where Appledawn made her queen nest. Smokeskull stiffened at the sight of Maplekit chewing on Poppykit's ears. They were so cute!
Appledawn lifted her head and blinked the sleep out of her eyes. "Smokeskull! It's just you." She huffed.
"Yes, I came to see you again." Smokeskull purred at Poppykit when

he squealed and batted Maplekit away. They were still half asleep. "Where is Bramblefang? He hasn't been in here since they were born."
The queen bowed her head and swung it over her kits. "He has his warrior duties to uphold." She whispered.
"He's a father," meowed Smokeskull, remembering how her kits real father, Firebreeze, was so protective of his kits. "He should be in here all the time." She looked over her shoulder out to the clearing in search for the bracken-coloured warrior.
Appledawn sighed and wrapped her tail over her lithe haunches, brushing Smokeskull's paws. Maplekit piped up, but her mother nuzzled her back down towards her belly and the kit hushed. "He's not, and I respect his love for the warrior code." The queen meowed.
Smokeskull sighed, but when her gaze rested on Poppykit, she stiffened. He reminded her of how much she wanted her kits back...if only she could take one and call it hers...
The Tom-kit lifted his muzzle and cried out. Appledawn nuzzles him, but he backed away. His beautiful blue eyes blinked at Smokeskull in delicate but impatient expectancy of her reaction. The grey warrior turned her head, but she couldn't help herself but throwing away her rejecting feelings of the his glimmering eyes.
"Come on, Poppykit. Hush for your mother," Smokeskull mewed, touching her nose to his.
Obediently, Poppykit huffed, then dived back down with his sister. He snuggled up beside her and suckled quietly.
Appledawn looked from her Tom-kit to Smokeskull. "You two seem to have quite a bond, even though you've only known each other for half a quarter moon!" She purred.
Smokeskull felt a rush of passion and pride for the tiny patched kit. He was so delicate and balanced in his so-far life. She was proud to be his friend. She'd never leave him like Lionstripe did...never.
"Appledawn?" A quiet meow came from the entrance. Squirrelmist stepped out of the sun and into the nursery. "The naming ceremony has just been passed. A lot of warriors will want to see those precious little bundles soon enough!" She was purring loudly.
Smokeskull piped up. "Did your kits become apprentices?" She asked, lashing her tail, knowing Blackwhisker would never let a newcomer like her have an apprentice no matter how hard she trained.

"Yes!" squealed Squirrelmist as she started to hop up and down. "Bluepaw and Goldenpaw will be the best apprentices they can be-right girls?" She turned around.
At first, Smokeskull didn't quite know the two new apprentices were behind her. "Which one will you mentor?" She asked, politely nodding at the straight-necked Goldenpaw. Otherwise, Bluepaw was dancing around Blackwhisker behind the golden she-cat.
Nodding back to her, Goldenpaw looked up at her mother. "Can go on a border patrol?" She mewed.
"Not until you know how to fight," Squirrelmist told her, "It could be dangerous if cats attack unexpectedly and you aren't ready."
Goldenpaw dipped her head respectively. "I understand. What about Bluepaw? She won't be able to-"
"Yes she will." growled Squirrelmist.
The ginger apprentice was clearly taken aback. "Sorry, mama. Can we practice hunting?" Goldenpaw mewed.
Squirrelmist purred at the energy inside her kit. "Yes. Let's go Bluepaw! We're going to Tallpines in the short clearing to practice hunting and battle moves." The mother ordered, and her kits were in front of her in an instant. Squirrelmist touched noses with Blackwhisker and turned away. Although he was the deputy, all fathers had to follow their mates...not lead or control them.
Smokeskull looked over her shoulder. The apprentices and every cat was out of the camp now. The only warrior in camp was her since Bramblefang left on a hunting patrol.
Her eyes narrowed into the nursery, straining to see what was going on. Appledawn had her head down and paws folded. Her long dappled tail was tucked over her two kits.
Smokeskull bit her lip. Since she thought of the idea of stealing one of the kits, that's all she could think about. The temptation was tugging at her thick pelt hard. Poppykit would be left alone one time and Smokeskull just had to have him. He would never even remember his real mother when he was full grown...
"Now you're thinking like a real Dark Forest cat!"
Spinning around at the voice, Smokeskull saw it came from Thornclaw. She was dreaming.
"Come on, Smokeskull. That kit loves you to pieces!" Thornclaw lashed his tail and came nose-to-nose with her. He looked crossed. "Why should he have to be trapped in a tiny confined nest with another kit and his fat mother when he could be hanging around

you; a true leader?"
True, Smokeskull confirmed. It was a tragedy he had to stay in that little nest with two other cats. "I love him too...as a son. Oh, Thornclaw!" She cried and fell to her haunches, "I need him! He's my last hope!"
Retracting soon after Thornclaw whipped his paw across her muzzle, Smokeskull glared at him. But he spoke first, "You're the leader of the Dark Forest! You can have whatever you want!"
Thornclaw backed away from her. "Ask and you shall receive." He moved into the shadows.
Waking up like a thorn in the hip, Smokeskull raised her head and blinked sleepily. She looked around the warm room, hoping to find a cat to suck up to. But no one was inside with her. With very fewer warriors remaining in camp, Smokeskull grew stronger within each heartbeat. All of PondClan were out now, and it would be the perfect time to steal a kit or have an attack. Unfortunately, the attacking part wasn't what was on her mind. Smokeskull would steal Poppykit.
The grey warrior got to her paws and trudged across her den into the clearing. Her ears twisted back as Poppykit tumbled over his rough sister, Maplekit. Smokeskull licked her lips and padded over to them.
Maplekit was first to pipe up. She flung at Smokeskull and batted at the long fur hanging from her chest. "Hi! Mama told us you're a really nice cat, I wanna see for myself!" The tiny dappled kit gazed at the grey warrior in the eyes as Smokeskull looked down and smiled.
"Do you want me to tell you I am?" Smokeskull glanced at Appledawn from the side of her green gaze. She continued make small talk until the mother left. But Appledawn was protective of her kits, she'd never let them out of her sight.
Poppykit sat up with his ears flicking and whiskers twitching in amusement. "She's my best friend!" He meowed and pounced on Smokeskull's paws.
Looking into the nursery, Smokeskull blinked twice before noticing her beautiful Tom on her paws. "Give me a second, I'm going to see your mother."
Maplekit and Poppykit threw their heads up and cried, "Can we come?"
"You stay right here, I'll be right back." She touched Poppykit on the

nose with hers, then turned and headed off to Appledawn in the doorway. "You look exhausted," Smokeskull meowed and licked the queen's shoulder. "I can take them for a while if you'd like."
Appledawn nosed her sympathetically. "Would you? That would be great, thank you." She moved back into her nest and laid down.
Smokeskull watched her eyes close before she slipped out and heading back towards the kits.
Yelping, Poppykit backed away from Maplekit. He blinked rapidly before turning to look at Smokeskull. "You're back!" He mewed happily.
To take you! Smokeskull thought to herself. She had to get rid of his sister before he could be taken, though. "Maplekit," She called, and the tiny dappled kit whirled around. "If you want to be a good warrior, how about you go check on the elders? Maybe bring them a squirrel or something."
The dappled kit scrunched up her nose. "Ew!" She snorted, "I'll bring them a mouse." Maplekit croaked before hopping away from them.
I would have never left my kit's side! Smokeskull hissed in her mind. She stalked forward and licked Poppykit on the head.
He jerked away. "I wanna be a good warrior too!" The spotted Tom wined.
Smokeskull rolled her eyes, but kept calm and pulled him close to her. "Come with me, Poppykit, and you will be the best warrior any forest has ever seen."

Chapter 39

Through the tall grass, Poppykit jumped at every cricket that bounced onto and over their path. Smokeskull enjoyed having a kit by her side now. She nuzzled him back to his paws every time he fell. She finally felt happy again; she felt like a real mother after a long time of missing her kits.
Another bug flew across Poppykit's head and he leapt up to get it, but fell on his flank. He got up and shook out his fur, only to continue his path. Smokeskull wondered how she would disguise her scent and Poppykit's. Maybe they wouldn't go after her; or maybe they would. It didn't matter, as long as she was with Poppykit. Her vow to revenge herself was almost completed. Smokeskull knew she just had to get him and her out of Poppykit's home territory.
Leaping over a rock, Smokeskull lifted Poppykit over as well. He was breathing heavily, even after such a short trip. It wouldn't be long before Appledawn realized she's trusted too easily and the leader of the Dark Forest has 'misplaced' one of her kits.
"Where are we going, Smokeskull?" Poppykit mewled. He sat down and licked at one of his paw pads. "My paws are tired from walking so much."
Smokeskull turned to him. "Warriors always walk this far. We're almost there, do you want me to carry you?"
Poppykit shook his head. "No. I can walk the rest of the way." He told her.
She nodded back to him. Smokeskull somehow liked how far he knew he could go. But she had a problem; what would she tell him when they were out of camp?
"Where are we going?" asked Poppykit.
Looking down at him, Smokeskull wondered the question to herself.
"I can't say," she forced a purr. "It's a surprise."
I'll have to make up a lie soon. He's smart, it'll have to be believable. Smokeskull thought and swayed her tail across the lowering grass behind her.
Displeased, Poppykit looked at his tuckered out paws. He didn't question her.

She knew it was the loyalty that kept him quiet because he trusted her. He trusted her. He really trusted her. Smokeskull realized this after her paws fumbled together and tripped over a log...a log?
The grey warrior stood up and shook herself off. She looked around, only to be the greeted with the woodland forest. They had reached the end of PondClan territory!
"Are you okay?" Poppykit leaned on her big paws.
Smokeskull decided her story and planned out the details. She sat down and licked her chest twice before looking Poppykit in his beautiful blue eyes. "When I was out hunting, I smelled wolf. I ignored it at first, then I saw it with my own eyes-" She forced her eyes to turn to slits. "I couldn't leave you there...not a perfect little warrior like you, anyways."
The patched kit shook his head and mewed in sadness. "A-and Maplekit couldn't come? Not mama? Not any of the other warriors?" He looked up at her, horrified and terrified. His family was going to be dead, as he thought.
But if it were true or not, either way Smokeskull would have felt no sympathy for them. She shook her head. Only Appledawn cared, and she was a soon-to-be elder; useless.
Plus, Smokeskull wanted her little kit to feel afraid of the forest. She wanted him to think she was his protector in which she was in every way...not only because she was, but because she needed him to be on her side. Soon, he'd call her his mother.
"The Clans need to fend for themselves; just as we will." Smokeskull told him. She sighed and glanced around the short-grassed clearing. Poppykit was playfully batting at a butterfly, distracted from his old family's harm. Smokeskull sighed and smiled. She was glad to have rid him of his tragic worry.
The butterfly flew away, across and over a golden patch of dandelions. Poppykit was about to chase after it, but Smokeskull placed her paw in his path. "Come, my son. We must journey the rest of the way tomorrow. As for now, we must find some shelter before dark." She tipped her head to face the sky, giving the air a sniff. "It will be raining before we know it."
Sighing, Poppykit and Smokeskull's eyes darted across the grass. When nothing was spotted, the patched kit huffed. "There is no shelter. Can't we just go fight the wolf instead?" He mewled.
He's smart, but he complains too much, Smokeskull rolled her eyes and turned her head to a tall log that must have been bowled over

by a lightning strike. It's roots stuck up, black and ashful, into the air like thorns from a rose. "There," she pointed her muzzle.
Poppykit tilted his ears back and looked over his shoulder at the dainty tree cave. "But-" He cut himself short and sighed in distress.
Critizise him! hissed a voice in Smokeskull's head. She snapped back to reality. "Poppykit!" Smokeskull growled chastisingly, "You're lucky you even have a nest to sleep in. Some cats sleep under the stars!" She glared at him.
But he didn't meet her eyes. Instead, Poppykit looked from his paws to the sky. It was suddenly getting darker. "It would be nice to sleep under the stars, wouldn't it?" He asked in a slight purr.
"StarClan is on neither of our sides," Smokeskull lopsidedly ended, "Not you or me...not any cat in this world!" She didn't realize she'd yowled the last part at him until Poppykit bowed his head and dropped his innocence and purr.
"I'm sorry, Smokeskull." He apologized.
She stopped her fussing and held his gaze for a long moment. "And I'm sorry for yowling." Smokeskull touched his nose with hers. "But that's another thing, Poppykit...I want you to call me 'mama'."
Poppykit looked into her eyes. His blue pupils gleaming off the long streaks of moonlight. "Mama." he repeated. The image of his old mother was clearly being replaced in his mind as he looked at his paws.
Smokeskull dipped her head. "Thank you," she meowed, swiping her glossy pink tongue across her muzzle. "Come on, Poppykit. Into the den."
Inside, it was thick and a little bit gooey. The walls were painted with sap, but the floor was dry and mossy. Poppykit jumped in and purred, pressing his nose, then jaw, then flank, against the boards to mark their territory. Smokeskull purred at him and shrank into the dull corner where no light shed.
"Mama, I'm hungry." Poppykit mewed, turning to her. He lost his delightful purr from a heartbeat ago.
That was right! Smokeskull had just remembered then that he was just a kit; he needed milk. Cardinalpaw had shown her what the borage leaves looked like a few moons ago. If only she could find some for this poor kit...
He rubbed his head against her chin. "Will you please teach me how to hunt?" Poppykit asked, his big blue eyes glowered up at her pleadingly. "I promise that I'm ready for it. And then you don't have

to give me your milk!"
Although Smokeskull hated the warrior code and the cats who obeyed it, she knew she had to refuse. "Not all she-cats have milk, silly." She purred as he sprang closer to her. "Maybe in a moon or so, but the warrior code has to come first. Do you know what that is?"
Poppykit tilted his head to the side. "No, but I've heard of it!" He mewed and tumbled over Smokeskull's big paws. "Will you teach it to me?"
"Of course I will," Smokeskull replied, "But it's getting dark for a little warrior like you to stay up this late. Why don't you go to sleep and I'll teach you the basics in the morning?"
Affectionately, Poppykit nodded. He unsheathed his tiny claws and pulled himself up to Smokeskull's broad shoulders. The patched kit trailed across her back and dived in beside her stomach. Poppykit purred softly and laid down to sleep.
Smokeskull gazed down at him. She recalled of the pure delight and warmth she'd once felt with her own kits. Now she felt it again. Happy, Smokeskull rested her head on her paws and closed her eyes.
But she suddenly awoke in a dream. In fact, she didn't even know if it was a dream or not, but it felt like it. Smokeskull rose to her paws and looked around. Poppykit was sleeping closely underneath her. It warmed her until the scent of Thornclaw wafted her nose. Silently stalking across the grass was the Dark Forest cat's lithe and skinny shape. He prowled closer and closer until his face was slightly visible in the dark haze of moonlight. "I bring words from the Dark Forest," hissed Thornclaw. His whiskers were twitching with anxiety and his claws were unsheathed painfully. "Yellow and ash, red in a flash. Orange but no clue, and no skies will be blue."

Chapter 40

All night, Smokeskull stayed up wondering what the words meant. They were so lopsided to her, it was touching. Yellow? Red? Orange? What? It was very confusing to her in every way.
But then, an unfamiliar stench crossed her nose. She sniffed. It was almost dawn. But another smell was coming from upwind. It couldn't be a cat...could it? No, Smokeskull knew the answer already. It was too faint to be the scent of a feline.
And it was musky. A draft entered the room. Now, Smokeskull was suddenly furious. The scent was dark; a rough, stinging haze. Fog began to steer itself around their den.
Smokeskull didn't recognize it at all. But she bent down and nudged Poppykit awake anyway. "Come, my son." She meowed gently as the patched kit got to his paws and yawned. "I don't know what's going on, but I do know something is wrong and we need to go."
Looking up at her, Poppykit was clearly worried. "Where to, mama?" He coughed in the thick black billows billows.
A flash of light flickered outside the log. "Anywhere but here!" yowled Smokeskull. She quickly bent down and took Poppykit by the scruff. He was getting heavy, but shand had no time to tell him to walk or even make him walk.
Outside was filled with heavy clouds of black smoke. Even with the morning sun rising into the sky, the fog was getting worse and Poppykit continued with his raspy coughing.
Another light flashed, coming from upwind. Smokeskull turned her head to see, but another billow was thrown into her face. Her eyes began to tear up. The patched kit in her jaws struggled, but she clamped her maw down harder and flung herself at the other direction.
A burning sensation poured in her mouth. Smokeskull finally figured out what Thornclaw had said in her dream; it was a fire!
Dashing over a tall stump, Poppykit finally wiggled free of her grasp and dropped to the left over greens of the forest. "I can run, too!" He yowled and turned the other way.
He raced through the trees, closely followed by Smokeskull. She was on his heels, even though he wasn't that fast yet. Finally, she

caught his scruff and jerked back. "Are you mousebrained?!" Smokeskull growled.
Poppykit bowed his head and dropped to his haunches. "Sorry, I just-"
"No!" hissed Smokeskull. She knew she was yelling, but the point had to get across somehow. "You can't run off like that, Poppykit! What if the fire got you? What if a badger was hiding in the undergrowth waiting to catch it's prey?" Her fur was bristling, not that she was mad, but she was disappointed. She'd never been so foolish as to-
"Fire?" Poppykit's eyes shrunk as he looked over his shoulder at where they'd just come from. "Y-You mean that thing?!" He began to wail in terror. He came to Smokeskull's paws and sat big-eyed in front of her.
Smokeskull looked where he was looking. Flames were engulfing their den now. Yellow, red, orange...all the colours Thornclaw had stated. "Yes!" She cried, but looking down at the pleading Poppykit made her worry.
"Please take me away from the scary fire, mama." He mewed, tears clouding his eyes.
Nodding, Smokeskull replied, "I will." She dipped her head, grabbed his scruff and ran forward, out of the dark fumes. The fire didn't catch up until she reached the river where they had to cross the water to get to the other side.
Huge red flames pulled over the trees like a huge monster eating their leaves. Smokeskull had never come across even a stream before. It had always been a puddle or two from rain. But this was ripping, tearing, killing water that could wash away any cat they wanted to. She knew the chance had to be taken...for Poppykit.
"Okay," Smokeskull turned to her little Tom and purred as if nothing was wrong. "I want you to stay on my chest. I don't care how long you have to hold your claws in my fur, do it!" She saw the afraid kit he was now, and sighed. "Do it so we can get out of this alive."
When Poppykit nodded, Smokeskull picked him up backwards and felt his flexing claws measuring how hard he had to cling on. She breathed in and jumped into the water. The cold waves washed over her, but she paddled quickly across.
Washing against her was another strong current. It ripped at her fur, dragging her down under the water. Smokeskull watched her

target shore fade away as another wave pulled her under. Poppykit dug his claws into her fur hard. His frail body was whipped against the current, but her jaws held firm and so did his claws.
She kicked her back legs and paddled with her front paws into the air once again. Smokeskull heard Poppykit gasp for air. She plunged under. But let him stay up. It was the only way he could breath. Either her or him would breathe that way; and it had to be him. Smokeskull would give her life for him any day.
Another swath of water curved over her back, but she felt the rocks under her paws, finally. Her eyes widened as her claws hooked onto a sharp stone, slicing her paw pad. Smokeskull was about to cry out when Poppykit mewed from her maw. Whirled against his body was cold water. She pulled up, crying at the pain of the rock in her foot, and launched Poppykit across the rest of the water at the shore.
The kit landed in the sand. His body laid for a heartbeat before scrambling to his paws. "Mama! What about you? Hurry!" Poppykit yowled worriedly.
Smokeskull cried out. Her yowl sounded hinfinite as she lifted her sliced paw and sunk into the water. Bubbles mounted around her. Growing from small, to big as they reached the top and disappeared. Her lungs collapsed. She couldn't breath. Her death was in a few heartbeats, she knew. Smokeskull closed her eyes and waited for death to corrupt her.
A loud splash from above her made her eyes shoot open. Her mouth went wide. She cried to call for help, scream, yowl, anything, to get this cat's attention. But the dark figure above her was not going for shore...it was Thornclaw, and he was coming for her.
The lithe-framed cat opened his maw and took her scruff. Bubbles followed him down, and bubbles followed him up. Smokeskull closed her eyes. She felt the darkness of the Dark Forest coming to take her home with them. Thornclaw's nostrils blew out more bubbles until they reached the top of the water.
He gasped for air, but Smokeskull could not breathe. She was dragged to the sandy side of the beach where Poppykit was still breathing heavily from his water adventure. "You saved her-!"
"Not yet," Thornclaw informed the patched kit as Smokeskull's vision faded into blackness. Her body went limp and she stopped breathing. But the feline's paws pushed at her stomach. She barely heard what he was yowling, but he was. It sounded like a chant. His voice was soft and gentle, not like the usual Thornclaw rasp.

Singing, Smokeskull thought and was awkwardly turned to the side. He's...singing. Thornclaw was singing to her.
Suddenly, the words got more clear as Smokeskull choked up water. She spit out most of the river in her body and choked the rest. Poppykit was beside her the whole time. He was nuzzling her shoulders the whole time, but she didn't even feel it. "Mama, are you okay?" He mewed after she spit out the remains of the river.
Smokeskull looked up at Thornclaw. Her heart began to beat faster and faster until he got off of her. It seemed he was on top of her to give her back her life. "Better now that you're both here with me." She didn't take her eyes off Thornclaw, but remembered how she hated it when Lionstripe left her for his mate. Plus, Thornclaw wasn't her mate...just a good friend. She looked at Poppykit and smiled.
"Good," the patched kit purred and rubbed against her muzzle. "But where are we going to sleep now?" Poppykit looked over the river. The flames were taking over the forest now. If they'd stayed any longer, they'd be dead...but they weren't. Smokeskull was going to thank StarClan, but realized they'd abandoned her long ago. Plus, they sent a Dark Forest cat to save her. How is that a thing that StarClan would do? Only the Dark Forest was on her side. She thanked them, instead.
But the question Poppykit asked hit her like a storm. Where would they stay? But Thornclaw spoke before she could answer, "That's what I'm here for,"
"I thought you were here to save me from the river?" Smokeskull glared at him.
"I thought you were a kittypet!" Poppykit chirped with crooked eyes. He sat down with Smokeskull as she sat up.
Thornclaw rolled his eyes. "Kittypet. What a sick word." He growled and zoomed out from where he was looking. He was clearly thinking. "That too," Thornclaw answered Smokeskull's question. He lashed his tail and an angry look painted on his face before he met Smokeskull's eyes. He eased.
"Kittypets are weaklings, Poppykit." Smokeskull purred at his soft and gentle touch. She was relaxed, but Thornclaw was tense. "Thornclaw is not one of them."
The Dark Forest cat growled again, but this time he said nothing. Smokeskull looked at him, but he turned away. "Let's find a den. We'll need it." Thornclaw looked around, quickly copied by

Poppykit.
"Where though?" The patched kit's eyes drooped. "It's all Twoleg territory; flat!"
Smokeskull dipped her head in agreement. "This is called Twolegplace, Poppykit. But yes, we do have to find shelter." She lifted her head over the river to look over. "We can go around the fire to another part of the forest...if there is still any." She bowed by her paws.
Nodding, Thornclaw looked past the river on the other side. The fire was still burning hot. It stripped the trees of their leaves, bark, and remaining cleavage. He stared into the middle; the heart. Smokeskull didn't understand, but she shook her head with a sigh, doubtfully. She had no idea what he had in there...his family, his old friends, maybe he had kits of his own. Smokeskull had no idea what he might have just lost.
"Over there," Poppykit pointed his nose at a bent silver twoleg boulder. The silver disk was clearly pulled off and thrown fox-length away from the bin. It's thin layer of shiny grey reflected their figures, and Poppykit went closer, then backed away. He continued until he was confused. Poppykit blinked, then looked up at Smokeskull and Thornclaw for answers.
But she didn't have any. "What about it?" Smokeskull huffed irritatedly.
"There's no rubbish in it, like that one." Poppykit turned to another silver twoleg boulder with rubbish pouring from the inside. A raccoon dug at it, then scaredly looked at them. Quickly, the prey dashed for the river.
Smokeskull licked her lips and forgot about the rubbish, racing after the fat raccoon. The black-and-white animal stumbled down the side of the rushing water and screeched when a splash flew into it's face. Smokeskull sprang at it in it's moment of terror and swiftly killed it with a bite to the neck.
When she finished dragging it back, Smokeskull looked down at the prey, but disgust painted her face. White foam began to gurgle out of the raccoon's mouth as it's eyes rolled back into it's head. Scanning the awful-stenched animal, Thornclaw looked closer while Smokeskull pushed Poppykit away from it. But loud crackling made them all look up. A huge monster in the sky was flying past. It's flapless wings soared over their heads, dripping droplets of cold water on their heads. It zoomed over until it reached the top of the

fire.
Smokeskull's eyes went wide as it's underbelly opened and sprayed water at the fire. Roaring twolegs yowled from their dens. It sounded somewhat like cheering as another monster came in and dumped a huge amount of water over the forest's newborn flames. Finally, after loads of water monsters passing over the sky, the burning stopped and the fire was put to an end.

Chapter 41

Poppykit made Smokeskull and Thornclaw a nest in the rubbish den. It was not very nicely-smelling, but it had to do for now. Thornclaw refused to sleep in it. He said it smelt like rubbish and he'd never sleep in one, ever. The Tom, instead, slept outside the silver boulder and disappeared when they were sleeping. Smokeskull guessed he was heading to the Dark Forest to share the news of Smokeskull being ready for them any time soon.
But Poppykit was hers to look after now; they would never let a, rather strong, she-cat with a kit of her own rule over the Dark Forest. Their whole purpose of darkness would be foiled.
The moon was high in the sky by the time Poppykit was asleep in the silver boulder. Smokeskull looked over the river into the forest. Ash was scattered over the dull black grass, and the trees were roughly scratched with fire-burnt scorches.
Lumbering over the trees, the air was turning cautiously and darkening blue-grey. Powerful roars boomed over her head as more clouds billowed across the sky like a crowd of herding buffaloes. Even though it was past moonhigh, Smokeskull's favourite time of the night, she was almost terrified. Poppykit would be, too, if he were awake.
But through the storm, there was no sign of Thornclaw. Smokeskull had to keep watch over the patched kit. He was showing no way of waking soon, and it received Smokeskull of her worry. She'd hate to have him afraid to have come out here on his second night away from home.
Right before she knew it, Smokeskull watched patterns of raindrops fall on the river. She could hear the song of rain on the silver boulder behind her. If only she could do something. Anything. It was like she was...bored. But why?
"Smokeskull!" whispered Thornclaw from a tall twoleg fence. His eyes were gleaming with pride. The grey she-cat turned up to him. She glared, but he hopped down and landed beside her. "My old friend said he knows a part of the forest that didn't burn."
But Thornclaw lowered his head when she continued to glare at him. "You mean a kittypet?!"

Gulping back a whimper, Thornclaw nodded.
"You sick fox-hearted fool!" Smokeskull stood up and slashed her big paws at Thornclaw's face. He staggered back. "You think I'm going to put my kit in danger because you think it's okay to trust a kittypet?"
Thornclaw was about to speak, but Smokeskull finished bitterly. "Have you seen the hedgehogs fly? There is no way I'm doing that. It could be a trap." She turned away in disgust.
A well-fed brown tabby jumped up onto the fence where Thornclaw used to be. The tabby was worry-eyed. "So I'm guessing you'd rather stay here until my twolegs come to take out the trash?" The Tom stirred his paws.
Smokeskull hissed protectively. "Kittypet!" She lunged at him, her skinny frame showing her ribs she sprung out. Her claws unsheathed as she tackled the Tom, throwing him off the fence into his yard. "Fear me, kittypet. I am Smokeskull, the leader of the Dark Forest."
The brown tabby landed on his paws after doing a harmful backflip in the air. He shook out his pelt and glared at Smokeskull. The ring of yellow in his eyes blinded her for a second and he pounced back at her.
But Smokeskull had her claws hooked in the fence tightly, and when he jumped, she slunk down the fence into a soft-soiled garden. The Tom went over the fence. She heard him crash into the puddled grass. Quickly, Smokeskull came up the fence to redeem her victory.
"Some leader you are," the tabby spat.
Thornclaw helped him up. "Come on, Smokeskull. Give him a chance."
Jumping down, Smokeskull glanced between the two Toms. She was uneasily hesitating. "Fine." But Smokeskull turned to see the kittypet smirking. She bared her sharp fangs and swiped her tongue over them to show him how hard she could bite and draw blood.
"Smokeskull, this is Timber." Thornclaw gave her a look of uncertainty before turning to his kittypet friend. "Timber, this is Smokeskull."
"Who's Timber?" yawned Poppykit, padding out of the silver boulder. But he sniffed in and arched his back. "Kittypet!" He cried.
Smokeskull raced up to him and wrapped her tail around him. "Timber, this is Poppykit. If you so much as touch him, I will gladly

shred every hair off your kittypet body." She licked at Poppykit's ears.
Timber blinked in disappointment and turned to Thornclaw. "I haven't seen you in a while. What's this she-cat talking about? The leader of the Dark Forest?"
"She will be, soon enough." Thornclaw replied. His tail tip twitching nervously with Smokeskull so nearby. "The best fighter she is, huh?" He chuckled.
Timber nodded. "She'd pretty quick for a cat who just had a kit."
Thornclaw gulped when Smokeskull shot them both a glare. "She has a name, you know!" Smokeskull turned back to Poppykit.
"Can you show us to the forest that you said that didn't get burned?" Thornclaw insisted to change the subject.
"Of course," Timber looked at Poppykit for a short time before Smokeskull blocked his gaze with her front haunches. "But some cat need to change her ways." He added in a growl.
Poppykit pushed his way out of Smokeskull's paws. "Are you really a kittypet?" He bounced up to take a look at Timber's black collar.
"Shiny." Poppykit gazed at the golden parts hanging off the strap around the kittypet's neck. "What are those?"
"These are my tags," meowed Timber proudly. "They help twolegs identify me if I get lost." He gazed back down at Poppykit warmly.
Smokeskull growled and pulled Poppykit closer to her. "That's why we don't need to be kittypets, Poppykit," she informed him, "Because us forest cats are free to go wherever we want," Smokeskull glared specifically at Timber. "And do whatever we want."
The kittypet bowed his head. "We are fed every day."
Poppykit's eyes glowed happily, but Smokeskull retorted. "You mean that icky muck they force you to eat?" She snarled, "No treats until you eat your rubbish, Timber!" Smokeskull mimicked the twolegs.
"At least they're nice!" Timber spat back.
"Timber!" yowled Thornclaw. "Watch your muzzle. This is the Smokeskull you're talking to, not just some normal forest cat." He lashed his tail, but didn't take his eyes off of Timber. "You're lucky to have this chance to speak with her. Show some respect."
Smokeskull was surprised he was so strict about lecturing this kittypet. "Calm down, Thornclaw. I'm not ancient yet." She purred.
"Still," Thornclaw turned away from Timber to Smokeskull. "You're

already there to me." He smiled weakly.
Poppykit mewed loudly. "I wanna see what it's like to be a kittypet for myself!" He announced with an excited look.
Smokeskull hissed. "You will never do such a thing!"
The patched kit bowed his head. "Sorry, mama." He sat down on his small white haunches. His dulled eyes glued to his paws.
Huffing, Timber leaned in towards Smokeskull. "The life of a kittypet isn't that bad," he meowed to her. "But I don't go on about it to your son." Timber looked over at Poppykit who was batting at Thornclaw's flickering tail.
Smokeskull glared at him, but turned her eyes to Poppykit. "He's my precious little Tom, you know. I would hate to lose him..." She sighed and looked at her and Timber's paws, leading up to his eyes. "But he isn't mine..." Smokeskull admitted to him.
Looked at her worriedly, Timber did not respond. He looked from her kit to her in uncertainty. But then, he began to watch as Thornclaw was playing with Poppykit, swishing his tail across the wet grass while the patched kit leapt at it. Poppykit squeaked every time Thornclaw lifted his tail and slammed it back on the floor, spraying muck at him.
"Definitely precious," Timber agreed. "I have kits of my own, you know. But my twolegs only let my mate and I keep one of them...they gave away the rest." The kittypet hung his dull brown head by his paws and sighed as he laid down. "Her name is Auburn. She is inside my nest in the den with my mate."
Although Smokeskull didn't care that much, she sighed. "I'm sorry for your loss." She meowed, then turned to look at him. His eyes were bright with happiness at thought of his own kits.
But then, Timber turned to her and their noses touched. Smokeskull looked away with wide eyes. "About that part of the forest..."

The rain had stopped by moonhigh, and the dark, booming clouds cleared away. Silverpelt was bright, but they refused to shine over Thornclaw and Smokeskull's heads. But they got their fill of moonlight.
Timber had shown them a way to the forest that wasn't burnt. He said there was a way across the river without getting wet. Not Thornclaw or Smokeskull believed him until Timber pointed to a huge bridge that centered from Twolegplace to the forest. But they

rested on the bridge instead of in the forest. Timber introduced them to his kit, Auburn. She was Poppykit's size and age.
"Auburn stays with my mate in her den, over there." Timber pointed proudly at a tall twoleg den with a beautiful garden and a long stream of silverthorn for a fence.
Poppykit was amazed by the view. He stood at the corner of the fence looking up at the beautiful sky after Timber taught him how to walk on it. He gloated on how amazing it was to walk on such a thin line of wood.
At last, Smokeskull arranged a meet up with Thornclaw at the end of the day. She was gazing out at her little Tom who was rolling around with Auburn tightly fastened onto his back playfully. Her long claws stretched out across the bark she was tightly clinging onto and made marks in it.
Thornclaw walked over to her and looked up into the tree. Smokeskull looked down at him. He spoke first, "Why don't you come down here to talk to me?" He growled to her.
"Why don't you come up here to talk to me?" Smokeskull sneered. "Come on up, Thornclaw." She smiled and huffed, shaking her head.
The black Tom smiled back at her and jumped at the tree, raking his claws up the bark until he reached the top. "You're a good cat, Smokeskull..." Thornclaw started, sitting with his claws engraving deeply in the wood branch. "I trust you completely."
Smokeskull looked at him awkwardly. She felt so released around him now that she knew at least one of his friends. "I trust you too," she purred and looked back at the kits. "What's this about Timber?"
Dropping his purr, Thornclaw looked out at Timber who was watching the kits lovingly, specifically at Auburn. "He's a good cat," he meowed, staring at the tabby now. "He's my son."

Chapter 42

"Really?" Smokeskull looked at him like he had just revealed a tragic secret which he did.
Thornclaw nodded with drooping eyes. "Before my mate died and I sent him away..." He trailed off and loosened his grip on the wood. "I looked after him even when I was in the Dark Forest and he couldn't see me...but I was there, beside him, through everything."
Smokeskull was reminded of her earlier plan. She used to be so uptight and scared. So tense and angry. She knew now that the plans were lost and abandoned back in time. Since she met Thornclaw, her attention focused on her determination to become the leader of the Dark Forest and not on her plans to destroy CloudClan. Her revenge was slowly sinking into extinction.
Angry at herself, Smokeskull looked up. "And it's worth it now that you can be here again with him, isn't it?"
"Yes," Thornclaw replied right away. "He's my son, what can I say?"
"I wish I could look over my real kits," Smokeskull grumbled, "From anywhere. But they're dead." She retorted negatively.
Sighing, Thornclaw sat down and relaxed. "I'm sorry you won't be able to see them again..." He looked at Smokeskull in the eyes. "But you have Poppykit. I gave him to you by temptation. You should at least be grateful he can be with you at all times."
Smokeskull growled. "At least I'll be there for him, and he'll know I am there!" She lashed her tail and jumped down from the tree. "If you're here to suck up to me, Thornclaw...maybe you shouldn't be here at all." Smokeskull darted towards the kits and sat beside Timber.
The kittypet was clearly startled. "What's the matter?" Timber asked, wrapping his tail around his paws.
"Thornclaw is being a sapface." She hissed.
Timber rolled his eyes and looked at their kits. Auburn was being nice and gentle with Poppykit, unlike Maplekit who used to tackle him every time he play fought with her. "Forget him. He's always like that." The brown Tom purred.
"You're not like him at all, you know." Smokeskull growled under her breath. She wanted to run away. Run back to her old Clan and

tear all of them to shreds. She wanted to rip apart all that was left of her first and last Clan. She once made a vow and refused to keep it, now she made a vow and vows to keep it!
The kittypet turned at her. "How would we be alike? I hardly know him." Timber huffed and looked back at Auburn. "I met him when I was just a newborn and he left when I was Poppykit's age. He's just coming up to me now like I'm some kind of miracle." The Tom rolled his eyes and lashed his tail in frustration.
Taken aback, Smokeskull sighed. "I know things that would blow your mind, Timber. But only some cat that treats your like you're the most amazing cat in the world would tell you such a thing."
Her eyes widened and a whirl of green flames flew in a circular motion before her shoulders settled and she sat properly.
Smokeskull was confused, she didn't understand what had just happened, but it seemed that Timber was pretty confused too.
"Are you okay?" He meowed in uncertainty.
Slowly, Smokeskull nodded. "Yeah, just a little flare of excitement. I have an idea."
Timber narrowed his eyes at her. "Can I help? I'd like to see what you forest cats do in there." He purred.
"It's not all fun and games, kittypet." Smokeskull warned, but lightened up at the fact that she would have her own apprentice again. It had been so long since her last. "I'll teach you some of my best moves, I guess." She purred.

The sun came up in a flash and Smokeskull awoke with Poppykit snuggled up in her paws. "Come on, my little warrior. It's your first training day."
She touched her nose to his head, but Poppykit bounced up happily. "You mean it? I'll be able to train with you and Thornclaw?" His eyes met hers brightly.
"Yes you will, but be careful out there." Smokeskull nuzzled him and stopped his bouncing. "I don't want you hurting anyone. I know how powerful you can be sometimes." She nudged him away and looked over Timber's fence.
The kittypet had taken Auburn inside after moonhigh and left her there, but he stayed inside as well. Smokeskull expected him to be out soon.
Thornclaw had stayed in the tree to sleep. He didn't speak to her the rest of the night, but he slept pretty loudly. There was no doubt

the magpies would be out soon.
"Good morning, Thornclaw!" meowed Timber from the fence.
Smokeskull hardly noticed he'd been there. "Fine day it is."
The grey she-cat's stomach grumbled. "I'm so hungry I could eat a badger." Smokeskull whimpered at Timber like he had a feast inside for himself.
Timber rolled his eyes. "Fine, I'll find something inside for you. My twolegs have gone anyways. I'll check the fridge." He turned and disappeared into his mate's twoleg den.
What's a fridge? Smokeskull crookedly crossed her eyes, then blinked it off. She sighed and moved on. "Poppykit!"
The patched kit pranced over to her. "Where's Auburn?" He mewed, looking around.
"You haven't asked for food in three sunhighs," Smokeskull fixed her eyes on her kit. "Is there something wrong?"
Poppykit looked at her. "Nothing's wrong, mama." He answered politely, licking his chest. "Where's Auburn?" He repeated.
"I don't know, go ask Timber." Smokeskull turned to the bridge where Thornclaw was standing on his hind legs looking down into the water. His front paws hung onto the low fence that was between him and the river. She didn't want to talk to him, but small talk had to be forced.
Walking up to him, Smokeskull sensed his fear scent. It was high. Maybe he's afraid of falling in, she compromised. She was barely half way across the bridge when the loud song of rushing water flowed into her ears.
"Greetings, Smokeskull." Thornclaw seemed emotionless. He jumped up to the side of the bridge fence and didn't look back down at her.
Smokeskull blinked in surprise. She didn't even know he knew she was there or even coming closer. "I was thinking," Smokeskull leapt up beside him and balanced crookedly on the boards. "Why don't we attack CloudClan?"
The black Tom turned his head instantly. He look her directly in the eye. "Are you serious?"
"Yes!" Smokeskull snapped, "We attack at moonhigh." She smirked.

"To us, the unstoppable cats!" yowled Timber after a long day of training.
Thornclaw and Smokeskull took turns on training, but she trained Poppykit more than the black Tom. Thornclaw taught Timber how

to hunt, and their training paid off because now they could feast on everything they caught.
Otherwise, Poppykit learned how to use his size for strength. She taught him the basics and how to claw down the arms if ever getting pinned down. They all enjoyed the bonding experience.
Now, all five of them gathered around the fresh pile of prey in front of them. All of their eyes glowed in amazement.
"We thank the Dark Forest for this meal tonight," prayed Thornclaw, "For all of these prey's lives in which we are about to feast upon." He opened his eyes. "Let's eat!"
Poppykit launched forward and stole a plump mouse from the bottom of the pile, then slipped away. Auburn stayed back, but Timber plunged after a fat fish and tore it away from Thornclaw. The black Tom growled and pulled it away, running off to his place under the tree. Smokeskull waited until they were all gone to take hers, but mostly all was gone.
Sighing, she took the first magpie Poppykit had ever caught. She was quite proud to be able to watch him do it. The patched kit had done an amazing job on his crouch. The bird never saw it coming. But of course, pride comes before pain. Smokeskull was proud of his elegance, yet was not very proud of the way he had done it. Poppykit flopped through the air and caught the magpie in his teeth, dragging it to the ground with his weight.
By the time she sat down, Smokeskull looked at the sky in realization that it was almost moonhigh. They'd have to attack soon or nothing will go their way.
"I'm ready when you are," meowed Timber from behind her. He padded over and sat down beside her. "Or are we still going at all?"
Smokeskull didn't reply until she was half-finished her magpie. She looked up at the kittypet. "You said you wanted to know what forest cat life is like? Well, Timber, here's your chance." She stood up and all of the cats looked at her. Even little Auburn's eyes turned to her. "Tonight at moonhigh, we attack CloudClan!" Smokeskull yowled proudly.
Poppykit bounced up to excitedly.
Smokeskull looked at Timber and he nodded as if acknowledging what she meant even if he didn't know what she was saying. "The kits will stay with Timber's mate in her den." She announced and watched as Poppykit's pride-filled eyes faded.
"Thornclaw and Timber, I want you at my sides until we get there."

Smokeskull paused, then added quietly, "We never know what's lurking in the shadows."
The brown tabby slunk closer towards her. "Don't you think they'll be suspicious if one of us needs help and call out a kittypet name?" He whispered.
Smokeskull nodded in agreement. "You're right. You're forest cat name will be Timberfall." She told him.
"Timberfall!" The brown tabby echoed happily, "I have my own warrior cat name! Yay!" The Tom stalked over to his kit and nuzzled her. "Daddy's got himself a new name, Auby!"
Auburn turned in disgust like a piece of fresh dung was just laid in front of her. "I don't care! Poppykit's name is way cooler." The brown kit turned to Poppykit and blushed.
Smokeskull rolled her eyes. "If my main warriors are ready, we can leave early. Thornclaw?" She looked around for the Dark Forest cat but he was no where to be seen. "Oh, where is he...Thornclaw!!" Smokeskull yowled out loud.
Suddenly, something pulled on her tail and Smokeskull instantly whirled around and scratched him across the face. Thornclaw lifted his head and growled in pain. "I was just fooling around! No need to get hissy on me." He blinked his left eye to see if it would work.
Huffing, Smokeskull barged past him. "It's moonhigh. Let's go." She puffed out her chest and led over to the bridge.
"Auburn, take Poppykit into the den and introduce him to your mother!" Timberfall ordered over his shoulder.
His kit stood up at the sound of his voice and urged Poppykit inside. The patched kit was clearly down, but he followed Auburn into the den through a small window.
Smokeskull led through the trees. She knew they'd have to cross the ash somehow sometime soon.
The forest was very dark. There were very few trees, and Silverpelt still refused to shine over Smokeskull and Thornclaw's heads as they padded along the forest roots.
The ground began to stick with ash and Smokeskull realized they would be entering PondClan territory any time. She couldn't be seen around there. Appledawn would be just itching for a way to get Poppykit back.
But more trees started to appear before their eyes and Smokeskull had never been so happy to see the tall not-burnt oaks. But a voice behind her made her head spin.

"So we meet again," meowed Willowstorm.

Chapter 43

"Take me to Skystar!"
"Sunstar is not seeing any rogues at the moment," Willowstorm corrected the leader's name and laughed at her mistake. "Especially if they've been executed already!"
Smokeskull slashed her claws at the CloudClan warrior. "I've never been executed from CloudClan territory." She retorted, "Only all of the other Clans."
The pale she-cat snarled back at Smokeskull. "You're no better than the last time I saw you; always grudging on everything and everyone!" Willowstorm tackled Smokeskull to the floor as two more CloudClan warriors jumped out of the darkness, easily recognizable to her.
Pinetuft and Thistlekit, one of Whitewind's kits, clearly from when she was a kit too. He was probably a new warrior now. They both took on one of Smokeskull's companions. Thistlekit took on Timberfall and Pinetuft took on Thornclaw.
The senior CloudClan warrior took Thornclaw by the scruff and whirled his back and forth until he went limp. She dropped him, and Thornclaw struck upwards, slamming Pinetuft's jaw back into her mouth and sending her falling backwards.
Timberfall stayed still until Thistlekit moved forward, barely a kit-step. Their eyes glued together intensively.
Willowstorm yowled in Smokeskull's face, and she yowled back. She dragged her claws along the pale warrior's ribs until she drew blood. Willowstorm cried in pain and pushed down until Smokeskull's breath was driven out of her.
But she pushed up with a lightly force and yowled in victory when her old sister dropped. That was too easy. She's faking it.
Smokeskull marched up to Willowstorm and pushed down on her shoulders until they both pushed together, but the she-cat didn't move.
Pinetuft yelped in horror as blood flung out of her body. She turned and screeched until she was safe in the midst of the forest where they couldn't hear her.
Thornclaw leapt to Smokeskull's side and nudged her. "It doesn't

matter if she's faking it or not, she's outnumbered now." He whispered to her and bound to Timberfall's side, snarling at Thistlekit.
But it seemed like Thistlekit didn't want to fight. "This Clan is full of weaklings!" He spat after watching Pinetuft race away.
"Feel these claws and you'll know why," threatened Thornclaw.
Thistlekit threw his head back and laughed, "Ha!" He leaned forward. "You think I'm scared of you?" Thistlekit hissed.
"You'd better be!" yowled Timberfall, backing up to let Thornclaw spring at the CloudClan warrior.
Thistlekit stood up straight as Smokeskull stepped between them all. "I remember you," She meowed, head turned to the CloudClan cat. "You're Thistlekit."
"Thistlepaw to you!" He lashed his tail in frustration. Smokeskull thought they'd have made him a warrior by now- "I was delayed because of my dare-devil, reckless behaviour." Thistlepaw stood proudly.
We don't have time for this! hissed Smokeskull in her head. "I'm pretty sure we don't care. Take us to Sunstar." She ordered the CloudClan apprentice.
The brown Tom growled back at her, but did not argue. Smokeskull guessed he agreed that his weak Clan deserved an attack to put them back on their paws. They did.
Throughout his silence, Smokeskull filled respect in the hole of empty vocals. "Thank you, Thistlepaw." She meowed.
CloudClan camp and territory was not burnt, making Smokeskull fear of the cats in it. Maybe PondClan asked them for shelter until the fire died away. Those weaklings should have all burned, thought Smokeskull as they padded into the camp.
Although she was skinny, Smokeskull was bulky. With Thornclaw at her side, they were definitely unstoppable. Smokeskull was overpowered by her long, sharp claws, and Thornclaw was overpowered by his speed and strength. His pelt was short and thick, making it hard to hurt him.
"Smokefur!" yowled another apprentice. Obviously she was one of Thistlepaw's littermates. She was short and golden yellow with blue eyes. Another littermate came out from behind; a brown tabby Tom-cat with a white underbelly, copying the first she-cat's eyes. Thistlepaw raced over to them and nuzzled the she-cat delicately. Then he met with the Tom and pushed him inside. Thistlepaw was

two times both of their sizes.
"I am Smokeskull, a proud cat of the Dark Forest." Smokeskull yowled when Sunstar padded out from her den. The leader jumped onto the Highrock and narrowed her eyes at the intruder. "Attack me if you dare." She growled.
Instead, Sunstar stood up. "Cats of CloudClan. This cat has entered and left our territory on her own will. It is time we showed her how strong we are!" The leader purred loudly when her cats yelled out their agreements. "Attack!"
The first who came at Smokeskull was Pinetuft and Swiftpaw, who was probably a warrior now. Pinetuft snapped her jaws at Smokeskull's legs and Swiftpaw snarled as she tackled her down, clinging to her back with her claws.
Second, Jaystep and Ashtail leapt out of the shadows of the warriors' den and attacked at her hind legs. Ashtail sunk his fangs into her tail, and Smokeskull whipped around and forcefully clawed him in the face. He backed away and shook his head, then plunged back under. Smokeskull whipped at Pinetuft and Jaystep who were attacking her shoulders. Instantly, she rolled over, sealing her underbelly with her hind legs, and bowled Swiftpaw at the two warriors.
Surprised, Swiftpaw let out a yowl and raced off to the side. Smokeskull supposed she hurt her paw or something when she rolled. But Jaystep leapt up and screeched as he landed square on her shoulders again and but down on her scruff, shaking roughly. Smokeskull arched her back, put her nose to the ground and rolled forward on top of him.
With the breath driven out of him, Jaystep groaning in pain of her weight on him and darted out from beneath, into the shadows. Smokeskull flung herself at Ashtail, but he said as already running away. She was unsuspectingly pulled down by another warrior. Whirling around, Smokeskull claws at the pale warrior but she clawed back. Their paws hit together, but Smokeskull was offended by the claws that attacked back. Willowstorm was on top of her, hatred intertwining her slitted pupils. "Die, rogue!" The she-cat snarled.
Smokeskull had never seen Willowstorm so furious. She was shocked by the sudden rage the pale warrior showed and pressed down on her chest.
Filled with angry and feeling betrayed, Smokeskull pushed up and

flew at Willowstorm, catching her claws into her ear, drawing blood. She snapped her maw down on her shoulder and pulled hard.
Willowstorm hissed and whirled around, pushing her head up to look at Smokeskull. "You're so fox-hearted, sister. I hate you for betraying me." She growled.
"I betrayed you?!" Smokeskull yowled disbelievingly. "You were nothing to me from the start. You were foolish to trust me." She dodged an attack from Willowstorm's slashing claws and continued harshly, "I tried to kill you when you were just a kit. I should have!"
Smokeskull fastened her jaws tightly onto Willowstorm's ear and pulled until half of it came off and only a ragged piece was left. She smirked and staggered back when Willowstorm nipped at her neck daringly.
The pale warrior flung back when Smokeskull swung her paws at her and crashed into the dirt, coughing. Ashtail snarled from behind her and leapt at her without hesitation. With one swing of her giant paw, Ashtail had long scars ranked over his face. He fell down, defeated easily. The grey rogue stood over the warrior and tightened her jaws around his neck. When the CloudClan cat went limp, Smokeskull threw her head back and yowled in victory.
Willowstorm stood beside Swiftpaw, staring in horror. Pinetuft dropped Thornclaw from her maw, soon copied by Crowfur and Jaystep. The CloudClan warriors retreated back to their nests and mourned Ashtail's death by themselves sadly.
Clearly the pale warrior had enough. Willowstorm looked up from Ashtail's body and growled at Smokeskull. Saying nothing, she swiftly turned and attacked the unsuspecting Timberfall.
Willowstorm snapped her jaws onto his neck and blood shot out from the surprised kittypet. Timberfall fell limp to the floor and Willowstorm looked at Smokeskull with blood dripping from her jaws.
Smokeskull quickly turned to Thornclaw. The Dark Forest cat was streaming with silent tears already. "This Clan will fear the Dark Forest for reasons in which are unbelievable. They will suffer much pain and hardly survive through many deaths caused by our paws." promised Thornclaw bitterly.
"I will avenge our loss with the fate of CloudClan...and every warrior in it." Smokeskull vowed out loud, "And then my revenge will be complete."